



Heidi Schorr

MILLENNIAL MEMORY  
PERSPECTIVES IN JEWISH  
AMERICAN FICTION

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Millennial Memory Perspectives in Jewish American Fiction



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This work is lovingly dedicated to my husband Florian  
and to my parents Marianne and Dr. Wolfgang



## Abstract

This work is rooted in the fields of English Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, and Jewish American Studies. It examines memory representation in exemplary works published around the millennial change by third generation Jewish American writers Jonathan Safran Foer, Shalom Auslander, and Nicole Krauss. The focus lies on the latter's work. Symbolic characters and objects connected to memory are discerned and analyzed in detail.

## About the Author

Heidemarie Schorr was born in Marburg/Lahn in 1976. She studied at Philipps-University Marburg and received her Magistra Artium degree in English Literature, American Studies, and Media Studies in 2003. In 2007 she joined the staff at the department of English Language and Literature at Hildesheim University. She has studied at Millersville University, Pennsylvania, and has taught at Georg-August University Göttingen and at the Hannover University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

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# 1 Introduction

This doctoral dissertation is concerned with the analysis of contemporary Jewish American fiction. First of all, this necessitates definitions of the terms *Jewish* and *American*. As to what constitutes Jewish American literature, the *Norton Anthology of Jewish American Literature* by Chametzky et al. delivers a rather inclusive definition that I use as the basis of my work:

“Jewish American literature” signifies an American literature that is Jewish: fiction, poetry, drama, memoir and autobiography, commentary, letters, speeches, monologues, song lyrics, humor, translations, and visual narratives created by authors who admit, address, embrace, and contest their Jewish identity, whether religious, historical, ethnic, psychological, political, cultural, textual, or linguistic. (3)

*Jewish* identity, according to this definition, can take on many forms. It can be defined by purely religious means, therefore embracing converts of all ethnic backgrounds, or by purely ethnic or cultural means, not placing focus on religious denomination. In between these two extremes, there are gradual steps. The variety of religious Jewish denominations is equally diverse, spanning Reform Judaism, Conservatives, Orthodox, and strictly Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox<sup>1</sup> Jews, the Haredim. Places of origin lead to major differentiations of Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, or Sephardim, Jews who trace their roots to either the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or to the Iberian Peninsula, later scattered to North Africa and the Balkans.

An *American*, in the eyes of Crèvecoeur, in his *Letters from an American Farmer*, first published in 1782 (see Letter III. “What is an American” in Baym 641-644), for example, is first and foremost a European immigrant (or a descendant of immigrants) to the North American continent. As limited as this definition is from today’s point of view, with regard to all Native American peoples in particular, and later immigrant waves from other parts of the world, Crèvecoeur’s stress on the opportunities awarded by religious and political freedom explains why people *came*, including the waves of Jewish immigration.

The many different categories mentioned in the quote by Chametzky et al. (3) can be extended further by bringing in the factor of language, implied by the term linguistic in the aforementioned quote. Jews in America have been and are writing in English, but also in Ladino, Hebrew, and Yiddish. For an even “broader and more inclusive definition,” Werner Sollors claims that ethnic literature comprises “works written by, about, or for persons

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1 a term widely used, however, considered offensive by some within the community

who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, as members of ethnic groups" (243). Including the word *about* extends the definition to literature that is not necessarily written *by* a Jewish person. *The Norton Anthology*, in contrast, notably stresses the *Jewish* identity of the author, however widely that can be defined, which is the definition I use in this work.

With a population of between roughly 2% (cf. Mandel Institute) and 2.5% or 5.5 million (Chametzky et al. 7), Jews in the USA are a minority. That is why many anthologies group Jewish American writing with that of other American minorities, e.g. the volume *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* (Kent). Berel Lang, in "Hyphenated-Jews and the Anxiety of Identity," points out the significance of the order of the words *Jewish* and *American*, and guides readers' attention to the use of the hyphen in the description of hybrid identities. Grammatically, the term used second serves as the noun and is thus stressed in comparison to the first term, used as an adjective. The hyphen is sometimes only implied. "The emergence of new branches of research within literature departments – African-American, Native-American, and Jewish-American Studies – is a sign of the widening range and awareness of what we now call hyphenated identities," says Aleida Assmann (*Introduction* 207). Her statement clarifies that this focus on certain, more or less assimilated, minorities is a rather recent development in U.S. American Cultural Studies.

Emily Miller Budick, interestingly, in the *Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, like Chametzky et al., uses the term *Jewish American* literature, in that order, without a hyphen. As these two major canon building works in English literature, the *Cambridge* and *Norton Anthologies*, use the word order *Jewish American* and spell the term without a hyphen, this is the term and spelling I use<sup>2</sup>.

As unifying elements for Jewish identity Berel Lang names the Holocaust and the foundation of the state of Israel (6). This, he states, is also true for Jews in the Diaspora, including Jews in the USA, although he stresses that Jews in America do not feel like they are 'in exile' and do not, in a majority, support Zionist ideas per se (ibid.). Yet, private, informal practice shows a strong connection to Israel (ibid.). The reason for American Jews not feeling 'exiled' might be tied in with Jews being in the Americas ever since Columbus. His interpreter Louis de Torres was Jewish and there is speculation that Columbus himself may have been Jewish (cf. Wiesenthal). Several later waves of Jewish immigrants, and no religious persecution, ensure that in the late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the U.S. is a home to its Jewish citizens, which,

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2 Some organizations call themselves American Jewish to imply a religious affiliation, or to stress the focus on Judaism from an American perspective, cf. The Princeton University Department of American Jewish Studies.

in turn, may serve as an explanation for the most common use of the term *Jewish American*, in that order.

The Jewish American minority is well adapted and very well represented in the cultural output of the nation. Scholars have pointed out the danger in stressing the latter fact. Overstating the representational ‘power’ of Jews in relativity to their numbers has led to a strengthening of anti-Semitic stereotypes. Although the reasons for Jews’ involvement with money, their education, and other aspects have been explained and discussed again and again at length, an ancient stereotype of a power-hungry people involved in dubious conspiracy theories crops up periodically. This leads to scholars having to re-address misconceptions that had been considered cleared up decades ago.

In a 2014 *Time Magazine* article, for example, Suketu Mehta realizes the need to explain (again) to readers the aspects in favor of Jewish immigrants’ general success in the New World, after critically discussing a publication<sup>3</sup> filled with racist stereotypes about immigrant groups. Mehta strongly argues against a specific ethnicity being a reason for cultural success or failure of immigrant groups, as do scholars like Steinberg, who is quoted in the article:

Scholars like Stephen Steinberg in *The Ethnic Myth* have pointed out that the success of immigrant Jews was largely due to the fact that they arrived in the U.S. with “industrial experience and concrete occupational skills” well suited to the booming urban economies of the new world. (Mehta)

Educated skilled laborers are likely to do well in any country they arrive in, regardless of their ethnicity, is the general deduction Mehta makes.

Josh Lambert points out in *Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture*, what historian David Hollinger calls the

“booster-bigot trap” which “tempts the scholar” interested in the contributions of a minority group to an industry or area of cultural endeavor—the role of Jews in the institutional developments of physics or of free-market capitalism or of the Hollywood studio system, [...] —“to choose between the uncritical celebration of ‘[Jewish] contributions’ and the malevolent complaint about ‘[Jewish] influence’”. (Lambert 11, quoting and paraphrasing Hollinger, 11)

The negative connotation of the term ‘Jewish influence’, implying an un-specific ‘power’ of a Jewish minority over a non-Jewish (“WASP”: white Anglo Saxon Protestant) majority, bespeaks of an anti-Semitic sentiment,

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3 *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld, 2014.

leading to the situation that a Jewish minority in a society has to justify itself for doing well economically and culturally.

The presence of post-millennial anti-Semitism in the Western world is exemplified in the following brief survey of incidents and studies: In 2007, Romanian-born Jewish Holocaust survivor, writer, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel was physically attacked in San Francisco by a self-proclaimed Holocaust denier (cf. McKinley). A 2011 study on anti-Semitism carried out by the University of Bielefeld revealed that 20% of the German population harbor anti-Semitic stereotypes (Zick). There were anti-Semitic killings in Toulouse, France in March 2012 by a self-proclaimed Al Qaeda member (Ghitis). A racist-motivated attack took place in the US in April 2014, when a self-proclaimed Ku-Klux-Klan member shot and killed three people outside Jewish community centers in a Kansas City suburb (Fitzsimmons). Right wing populist policies and continuous incidents in Hungary in 2014 lead to Israel summoning the Hungarian envoy to discuss anti-Semitic concerns (*Haaretz*). In the 2014 attack in which three people were shot dead at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, the perpetrator has ties to radical Islamism (BBC). These ‘incidents,’ appearing to be anachronistic in a post-Holocaust world, committed by single perpetrators from different backgrounds, continue world-wide.

Chametzky et al. point out that discrimination and anti-Semitism have been an ongoing issue in the U.S.. About the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they remark that “[d]espite their good citizenship and prosperity, American Jews [still] faced discrimination. They were excluded from Gentile neighborhoods, certain hotels, summer resorts, college fraternities, and upper-class social clubs” (111). Workplace and academic discrimination were also common (*ibid.*). Even lynchings were reported from the South and “[i]n response to the violence and to the defamatory attacks on Jews in the press, the B’nai Brith<sup>4</sup> formed the Anti-Defamation League<sup>5</sup>” (*ibid.*). Despite a history of anti-Semitism, and isolated anti-Semitic attacks in the new millennium, Jewish life in the US is and has been a normality. A strong, publicly visible Jewish community in their midst is something that other countries, for example Germany, are still getting used to (again), while US American Jewish life has a long standing tradition before and after the Holocaust. This normality of Jewish American life paves the way for literary topics beyond the Holocaust by Jewish American writers, which my work stresses.

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4 Hebrew for “children of the covenant”, cf. [www.bnaibrit.org](http://www.bnaibrit.org) where it is stated that the organization “[has] advocated for global Jewry and championed the cause of human rights since 1843.”

5 cf. [www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org) The ADL was “founded in 1913 ‘to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all.’”

The term *Holocaust* is frequently used in my work. Although its focus is not only on Holocaust representation but also on further themes represented in third generation American fiction, many references to the Holocaust are made. Etymologically derived from the Greek *ḥolokauston* (ὁλόκαυστον) “a burnt offering for God” in the *Septuagint*, thus implying religious significance, the term’s use is controversial (cf. Gross/Rohr 32). The slightest implication that such a human-planned, industrialized, and executed genocide could happen in accordance with pleasing a god is unacceptable from a religious, as well as from a secular point of view. Rohr and Gross refer to Garber and Zuckerman’s article (202) inquiring into the term’s use for a detailed explanation of this controversy. Garber and Zuckerman state that Elie Wiesel’s use of the term in the late 1950s was decisive for its establishment despite its etymological origins (ibid.). It was subsequently used more prominently than the Hebrew word *Shoah* (השואה, HaShoah, the catastrophe), say Gross/Rohr in reference to Garber/Zuckerman (33). Following most scholars of today, I use both terms synonymously but wish to direct attention to awareness of the terminology.

In this work, the Holocaust is one of three main themes that are analyzed in connection with memory representation. It appears in literature mostly represented as a traumatic form of memory. Memory, and trauma as a specific form of memory, are defined in chapter two in detail. The Holocaust emerged as a theme in Jewish American writing almost immediately after it happened. The interest of this work lies in how it is represented by contemporary writers and how it compares in significance to other themes. The question of Holocaust commemoration in fiction is one that has been and is of great interest to (Jewish American) writers and to scholars.

The turn of the millennium sees a significant amount of literary output by Jewish American authors. In the 2011 article “Around Reading”, Josh Lambert asks rhetorically: “[...] when in history have there ever been more professional, full-time Jewish writers?” In “Since 2000” (640, footnote 47), Lambert notes that while *The Norton Anthology of Jewish American Literature* of 2001 by Chametzky et al. “attends to a total of 143 writers, [this] is less than a tenth of the number of writers whose work has been reviewed in *Jewish Book World* since 2000”<sup>6</sup>. He rejoices at the fact that “[...] the common pool of knowledge about Jewish life, culture, and thought will continue to grow deeper, year by year, and page by page” (“Around Reading”).

Without undermining or overly stressing the following fact, one can say that there is a general perception that Jewish American life with its cultur-

6 Lambert, for his weekly column “On the Bookshelf” for *Tablet Magazine*, written between 2009 and 2011, focused on “titles with some connection, however tenuous, to Jews or to Judaism” (“Around Reading”), covering 874 new books, and being, according to himself, “hardly exhaustive” (ibid.).



al output is in a state of well-being and positive development. Josh Lambert gave a paper at the Princeton Conference ‘American Jewish Culture: “Fresh Vitality in Every Direction”’ the title of which does not only attribute well-being to Jewish American culture, but actually refers to a “boom” in same said literary output: ““Strange Times’: The Millennial Boom in American Jewish Literature”. This ‘boom’ is carried, in part, by well-established Jewish American writers. Philip Roth alone, before publicly announcing the end of his writing career in 2012 (Remnick), has published eight novels after the turn of the millennium<sup>7</sup>. Younger writers debuting, however, produce the majority of output now, securing continuance of, and refreshing, the Jewish American literary tradition. The literary achievements of these “new generational” (J. Lang 45) Jewish American writers can be viewed in their high critical acclaim. The term “people of the book” applied to Jews by Muslims<sup>8</sup> (*Qur’an*, Arabic: أهل الكتاب, ‘Ahl al-Kitāb) and also by Jews themselves (cf. Chametzky et al. 2) (Hebrew: עם הספר, Am HaSefer) refers to the fact that a history of the Jewish people is told in *the book* – the Torah/Bible, Old Testament/*Qur’an*. It is also used in reference to the meaning *learned* people, and as of recently, around the millennium, is applied to the fact that Jewish American literature is being published in such high numbers.

## 1.1 Jewish American Literary Tradition

In order to reach a definition of what is generally called the *third generation* of Jewish American (Holocaust) writers, it is necessary to have a look at the Jewish American literary tradition: The era from the earliest known Jewish American author to the contemporary authors focused on in this work covers a wide variety of Jewish American writing over several hundred years. The following presentation of periods and literary themes creates an overview of the Jewish American literary tradition and facilitates understanding of comparisons made with regard to choice of material, language, or narrative style.

Chametzky et al. divide the sections in their anthology of Jewish American literature mainly according to literary currents during or around waves of immigration, as “[t]he literary emergence of American Jews, from the margins of American life and culture at the turn of the twentieth century

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7     *The Human Stain* (2000), *The Dying Animal* (2001), *The Plot Against America* (2004), *Everyman* (2006), *Exit Ghost* (2007), *Indignation* (2008), *The Humbling* (2009), *Nemesis* (2010).

8     cf. Haleem’s Introduction to his translation of the *Qur’an* (2004) about the term’s use in the Medinan suras, referring to Jews and also Christians in pre-Islamic times, but also those contemporaneous of Mohammed.

into its mainstream by mid-century, was accomplished only after the mass arrival of Eastern European Jewry" (7). The biggest partition can be made between pre- and post-Holocaust Jewish American literature. The pre-Holocaust sections in the *Norton Anthology* are named: "1. Literature of Arrival, 1654-1880; 2. The Great Tide, 1881-1924; 3. From Margin to Mainstream in Difficult Times, 1924-1945" (Chametzky et al. 12). The first period refers to the first arrival of immigrants in the future US in general, among the earliest of which were Jews, already, such as the prominent figure of Abraham de Lucena. Writing to Governor Stuyvesant in New York in 1656, to claim basic rights for Jews, Abraham de Lucena represents Jewish political involvement from the very beginning of colonization of what were to become the United States (Chametzky et al. 2).

The most famous early Jewish American writer is Emma Lazarus, daughter to Sephardic Jews whose ancestors had arrived in New York during the colonial period. Her sonnet "The New Colossus," written in 1883, was inscribed inside the base of the Statue of Liberty in 1903. The best known lines are the ones welcoming immigrants to the country. Lazarus is known as a literary figure and early Zionist<sup>9</sup>. Chametzky et al. state that, "[i]n a sense, her intellectual and literary development reflect a continuity and connectedness among America's Jews generally and its writers specifically" (6).

The second period comprises "forty years of massive Eastern-European Jewish immigration, [and] focuses upon questions of language" and the immigrant experience (Chametzky et al. 13). It is also the beginning period of flourishing, specifically Jewish, humor which is given an extra part in the anthology. During this time, pogroms in Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and Romania (cf. Chametzky et al. 109, and AICE) forced many Jews to emigrate. These pogroms fostered not only the waves of migration to the US but also the idea of the Zionist movement of a Jewish homeland.

The third period, prior to and during WW II, sees more Jewish American writers publish in English and is described as "cataclysmic years [which] saw intensive literary production" by Chametzky et al. (14). Still concerned with the immigrant experience, like Henry Roth's *Call it Sleep* (1934), this period also sees modernist experiments, for example in Yiddish poetry (ibid.).

The Holocaust, as the traumatic event that divides time into a *before* and an *after*, has left its imprint on Jewish American literature. The fourth period, called "Achievement and Ambivalence, 1945-1973," identifies Jewish American ethnic characters in the writing of Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth, and leftist and feminist-defined writing by Tillie Olsen and Grace Paley (ibid.).

Dominick LaCapra states in *Writing, History, Writing Trauma* (158): "In the United States, the survivors didn't have an audience in the general pub-

9 cf. Esther Schor's biography *Emma Lazarus*

lic [...]. It was almost like going from Auschwitz to Disney World [opened in 1971] and in Disney World, people don't want to hear about Auschwitz" (quoted in Rohr/Gross 31). The impression that "survivor memories were unwelcome and went unacknowledged in the post war years" is shared by writers such as Peter Novick and Hilene Flanzbaum, say Gross and Rohr (ibid.). However, this view is countered by historian Hasia Diner in her work *We Remember With Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962*, in which she claims that this supposed 'silence' is a myth, and that, in fact, immediately after 1945, eye-witnesses began publicly discussing the Holocaust. Chametzky et al. state that "[l]ike Bellow, Malamud, [Philip] Roth, [Cynthia] Ozick, and others, and spurred in part by Elie Wiesel," poets like Allen Ginsberg "struggled somehow to integrate the Holocaust along with other legacies into Jewish American self-reflection" (14). The Jewish American self-reflection mentioned is mirrored in writing and writers as a theme, for example in Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* and in Roth's Zuckerman novels. During this period, Jewish writers became popular with musical theatre on Broadway, as well (ibid.).

"Wandering and Return: Literature since 1973," the fifth and last period, covers the time span up to publication of the volume in 2001. Chametzky et al. praise the diversity of Jewish American literary output of this period. "As the children of Holocaust survivors come of age," they state, "many write about the Holocaust they did not directly experience, thereby shaping contemporary Jewish awareness, as in *MAUS* by cartoonist Art Spiegelman" (15). Spiegelman's creative milestones *MAUS I + II* (1986/1992) are not the only graphic novels or works of sequential art by American Jews on Jewish topics from this period of time. Will Eisner's much lauded *The Contract With God Trilogy* (1978), for example, depicts Jewish American life in Depression-era New York City.

A new title is needed for the current period of Jewish American literature and the millennium marks a rough cut off point for a new, younger, emerging 'generation' of Jewish American authors. Thus, inspired partly by Lambert's terminology, I suggest *Millennial Perspectives*, which appears to aptly convey his sense of "fresh vitality" in Jewish American Literature in a new era, discussed earlier. As a starting date the 1990s, as a decade with many aesthetic changes in pop culture, can serve as a marker. If anything, Jewish American literature at this new stage, by this so-called *third generation*, as in third generation of Jewish American authors writing after the Holocaust, has become even more diverse. Allegra Goodman, the last author mentioned under period five in Chametzky et al. is someone who already fits into the new, millennial definition.

The counting of the Holocaust eye-witness or contemporary witness 'generation' as the *first* generation is not to deny the longstanding Jewish

American literary tradition summarized above. The use of the term generation needs clarification at this point: The difficulty of finding a starting point for the definition of a sequential progression of generations is pointed out by Karl Mannheim in his “The Problem of Generations”<sup>10</sup> (1928). He states that most scholars define the duration of a generation as roughly thirty years (5), at which point, usually, the next generation is born. As “[...] birth and exit of humans in a society happen continuously, full intervals are only to be found in the single family,” states Mannheim (my translation<sup>11</sup>, 6). Ulrike Jureit, in her Introduction to Mannheim’s text, stresses the elements decisive for him with regard to what constitutes a ‘generation’: “Common cultural context, chronological contemporaneity, and perception of events from the same strata of life and consciousness,” are his conditions for “generational collectivization” (my translation<sup>12</sup>, 1).

The term first *generation* Jewish American writers is thus rightfully used to identify a group of people who have encountered the same events, war, national socialism, discrimination, deportation or emigration, at a certain time in history, during the nazi regime (1933-45). There is not one generation with regard to *age* that survived the Holocaust. There were old and young survivors. Yet, they are considered one generation, through this experience they have in common as direct eye-witnesses or contemporary witnesses. As stated, divisions of primary Jewish American literature are usually centered round the aspects of early Jewish immigrant literature or pre-Holocaust literature, Holocaust survivors’ writings, and the works of the following two generations. The generation who has (eye-) witnessed the Holocaust is usually called the *first generation*, with the Holocaust as the starting point of generational counting, in accordance with Jureit. Their children are called the *second generation*, and the next generation removed, the grandchildren of generation one, so to say, constitute the *third generation*. Jessica Lang mentions that she finds the often-used term “third generation *survivors*” (my italics) ambiguous. The term, usually referring to the grandchildren of survivors of the Holocaust sets up a “cumbersome pedigree,” which is why she uses the term “third generation Holocaust writers” (54).

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10 Original title: “Das Problem der Generationen.”

11 Original text: “[...] Geburt und Abgang der Menschen in der Gesellschaft erfolgt kontinuierlich, volle Intervalle gibt es nur in der einzelnen Familie, [...]”

12 Original text: “Gemeinsamer kultureller Kontext, chronologische Gleichzeitigkeit sowie die Wahrnehmung des Geschehens aus der gleichen Lebens- und Bewusstseinsschichtung heraus gehörten für Mannheim den entscheidenden Voraussetzungen generationeller Vergemeinschaftung.”

The question of generations is not only of interest with regard to the classification into time periods of writing but is also a theme in the novels discussed in this work with regard to the transmission of knowledge and memory from one generation to the next.

## 1.2 Third Generation Jewish American Writing

Paul Zakrzewski's 2003 compilation of contemporary Jewish American short stories, *Lost Tribe—Jewish Fiction from the Edge*, displays the wide variety of young emerging third generation Jewish American authors and their topics. He calls them the "post-Roth" generation (xx). They no longer focus on immigration in their writing, as they are "no longer poor and marginalized" (ibid.). Also, their writing bespeaks "of a Jewish identity not based solely on identification with Israel or the Holocaust," Zakrzewski states (xxi). In the short stories of his compilation he sees a rise in topics "to be found in Jewish life today: the tensions (and distance) between the religious and the secular; the search for an authentic identity," for example (ibid.). These are themes reflected in the long fiction analyzed in this work, as well.

The Holocaust is still a topic for this generation of writers. Zakrzewski sees a specific link between Jews and *memory* and reflects how memory is often coupled with the notion of loss in third generation Jewish American writing. This refers mainly to "the biggest loss of all, the destruction of European Jewry. Yet these stories don't claim any direct relationship to the Holocaust; rather, they explore the complexities of remembering" (Zakrzewski xxii/xxiii). Another kind of loss Zakrzewski sees reflected in this generation's writing is the loss "of Jewish heritage through assimilation" (ibid.).

As stated at the beginning of this introduction, scholars like Josh Lambert see the writing of this new generation as

a new camp, a new movement: a group of fiction writers, each regularly if not exclusively telling stories about Jews, who had rocketed to prominence—measured in sales and attention from the mainstream press and academy—in such quick succession as to produce an unmistakable echo of the postwar "breakthrough".<sup>13</sup>

This 'breakthrough', also called a *golden age* of Jewish American writing, is repeated now, as is Lambert's main point, because an institutionalization of Jewish American writing has given much support to young writers (ibid.).

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13 I am indebted to Prof. Lambert for the provision of this unpublished version. He is referring to an earlier statement by Mark Shechner. Now slightly changed in Wirth-Nesher, 622/623, Chapter 31: "Since 2000".

Also, young online publications like the left wing, liberal Jewish American magazine *Heeb*<sup>14</sup> or the more conservative *Tablet*<sup>15</sup> reach a wider, younger audience, while traditional magazines like *The New Yorker* keep publishing fiction by Jewish American writers.

New York City as the cultural center of the Jewish American population, with “13% of all Jews in the U.S. [...] by far the most in any metro area” (Kravitz, also cf. Lugo et al.), plays an important role in this repeated breakthrough. Shana Liebman’s storytelling collection *Sex, Drugs & Gefillte Fish* from 2009 reflects this in stories by bloggers, comedians, journalists, poets, writers, directors, actors, and others all in some way or other based in and around New York, presenting their personal, contemporary, Jewish American experiences. The authors whose works are analyzed in this dissertation are all centered in New York and their novels are mostly set in that city.

Third generation Jewish American writing is very diverse and encompasses very much output, as described by Lambert and Zakrzewski. Publications like Jonathan Safran Foer’s 2009 non-fiction book *Eating Animals*, investigating the inhumane and health-hazardous practices of American factory farming, or Sarah Glidden’s 2010 graphic novel memoir of her *taglit*, or birthright<sup>16</sup> trip to Israel, *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*, are examples of literature that draw a new, not necessarily Jewish readership. They are successful not only in America, but are translated and published throughout the world.

The non-fiction topic of Foer’s book on vegetarianism and the general interest of ‘authentic’ depictions of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians are only two examples of topics of third generation Jewish American writers publishing material of universal interest, hitting a contemporary nerve. They are not only geared toward a readership interested in particularly Jewish experiences. However, they set incentives for interested readers to investigate further literature by this generation, thereby eventually attracting new groups of readers to Jewish American topics.

Foer is better known for his Holocaust fiction, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002, edition used in this work: Penguin 2003) and for his novel dealing with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005, edition used in this work Penguin 2006). These two novels are analyzed in my work with regard to their Holocaust and trauma themes and these themes’ representation. Shalom Auslander is another member of this ‘new movement’ of third generation Jewish American and New York-based writers. With an Orthodox Jewish background from which he has separated himself in a process traces of which are detect-

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14 URL: <http://heebmagazine.com>

15 URL: [www.tabletmag.com](http://www.tabletmag.com)

16 cf. [www.birthrightisrael.com](http://www.birthrightisrael.com)

able in his work, Auslander tackles Jewish (religious) subjects in controversial ways, as his memoir *Foreskin's Lament* from 2007 displays. His novel *Hope: A Tragedy* from 2012 is analyzed in this work as a novel with a unique approach toward representation of Holocaust memory. His use of the iconic figure Anne Frank is the focus of the analysis of his novel.

Nicole Krauss, finally, whose two novels *The History of Love* (2005, edition used in this work: Penguin 2006) and *Great House* from 2010 are analyzed in detail in this work, is also one of the many Jewish American authors debuting and continuing to publish around the millennium. Her work, written in English and including fragments of Hebrew and Yiddish, contains representations of Jewish American life, culture, and thought which this work analyzes in detail. She creates representations of Jewish American identities with a potential for durability, as they address universal subjects from a specifically Jewish American perspective. As members of the third generation defined above, Foer, Auslander, and Krauss write fiction on universal topics such as *memory*, from a distinctly contemporary, Jewish American perspective. This work examines their representation of specific themes tied in with memory. Against the background of the rich Jewish American literary heritage, continuity and breaches of representational tradition are examined in Krauss' works, especially. She has published three novels to date, *Man Walks into a Room* in 2002, *The History of Love*, and *Great House*. All three novels are concerned with representation of memory, the latter two with particularly Jewish American memory. They share complex, multi-plotted and non-chronological structures, intertextual references, and a narratology of *blanks*, explained and discussed in later chapters.

Krauss incorporates traditional topics associated with Jewish American literature in her work, such as the Holocaust and *writing* or *writers* as a self-reflective aspect. At the same time, the third generation discovers 'new' topics such as a more authentic depiction of *the family* and U.S. American Jews' relations to Israel. A cultural studies approach toward third generation Jewish American literature creates access to the production of a specific kind of literature and culture. In Krauss' texts, construction of contemporary Jewish American identities and aspects of contemporary Jewish life are represented. Special attention is paid to the aspect of contemporary Jewish history of transmission of Holocaust memory. The question what is to happen with Holocaust memory after the eye-witness generation is gone is addressed indirectly by the novels analyzed and is discussed in connection with scholars' thoughts on the issue, for example memory scholar Aleida Assmann's. In her dedication to *The History of Love*, for example, Krauss expresses gratefulness to her ancestors for having passed on their Jewish culture to her and later generations and thereby underlines the flourishing of Jewish culture in the face of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. Krauss' full



dedication reads: "FOR MY GRANDPARENTS, who taught me the opposite of disappearing and FOR JONATHAN, my life"<sup>17</sup>.

This work analyzes the representation of memory and stresses its importance in third generation Jewish American fiction. Beginning with works by Foer and Aulsander, it eventually focuses on Krauss and her relevance as an author in this field, as her work represents universal topics, a specifically Jewish American view, and contributes to empathy-based, intercultural human understanding. Krauss' literature represents historical experiences of a cultural group with a certain collective identity: Jewish Americans and specific Jewish American experiences are represented in her work. Her text is a potential classic with regard to universality of topic choice, means of representation, and creative narration. It is necessary to analyze how Krauss' texts are embedded in a literary tradition and continue to include Holocaust fiction although twice removed from the eye-witness generation, while, at the same time, they discover new topics.

I have identified three main themes in contemporary, or millennial, Jewish American fiction, from which three types of symbolic characters tied to memory representation are deduced, as this work shows. These themes are *traumatic Holocaust or war memory*, *writing and memory*, and *the family and memory*, and the deduced symbolic characters are the (Holocaust) *ghost*, the *writer*, and the *family member*. Symbolic ghost characters in Foer's and Auslander's texts are analyzed in chapters 3.1 to 3.1.3 of this work. Krauss' text provides the best clear cut examples of all three types of symbolic characters and her novel *The History of Love* serves as the text for an in-depth analysis of them in chapters 3.2 to 3.4.2.

Symbolic *objects* are used in the representation of memory with regard to all three main themes in contemporary Jewish American fiction, as well. Krauss' novel *Great House* employs one specific symbolic object, a desk, in representing all three main themes tied to memory. Her novel is analyzed in depth for this one major and other, minor, symbolic objects in chapter four. A conclusion sums up the findings of a close analysis of the specific works of third generation Jewish American literature and discusses literary continuity and breaches of tradition.

For the theoretical foundation of this work, memory terminology, categories, and definitions as put forward by Aleida Assmann and others are presented in the following in chapter 2. Special regard is paid to traumatic memory. One aim of this dissertation is to point out the 'normality' of Jewish life in the United States which can serve as an example for the re-emergence of European Jewish life. In Germany, for example, apart from bigger

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17 Four black and white photographs of her grandparents in their younger years accompany the dedication. Further visual impulses are given throughout *The History of Love* through symbols representing each main character.



cities like Berlin, little public Jewish culture is visible in everyday life. More often than not Jewish life stays out of the spotlight. There is a void by years without Jewish culture that has to be filled again and cultural memory about the Holocaust must be kept alive. While, on the one hand, Jewish life in the USA has undergone a 'normal' development toward a proud, often secular culture oriented approach to being Jewish, there is always the question of how to commemorate the Holocaust. Holocaust memory is introduced as an example of traumatic memory, and also as an example of a topic which causes and displays certain power struggles in memory. A general theory of power struggles in memory, beyond the particular topic of the Holocaust, as according to Raymond Williams, provides the structural order of chapters three and four. I form my line of argumentation about the topicality of the cultural themes represented in the works analyzed on the basis of Williams' theory explained in chapter 2.4.

## 2 Memory

“Everything points to the fact that the concept of memory constitutes the basis for a new paradigm of cultural studies that will shed light on all the interconnected fields of art and literature, politics and sociology, and religion and law,” says Jan Assmann in the 1992 foreword of his 2011 English publication *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*<sup>18</sup> (vii ff.). His book is the result of his joint research with Aleida Assmann. Jan Assmann treats mainly Mediterranean and Middle Eastern early written cultures (ibid.), whereas Aleida Assmann’s 2011 work *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization, Fictions, Media, Archives*<sup>19</sup> “focuses on the forms and functions of cultural memory from antiquity through to the (post) modern age” (J. Assmann vii). Her work on memory constitutes the theoretical basis for the different forms of memory I analyze in my work. She draws on the aforementioned quote by Jan Assmann calling memory “a major new area of cultural studies”, and a paradigm connected to “a wide variety of disciplines,” (A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory* 167).

This work exemplarily studies output by contemporary Jewish American writers, members of a cultural minority. These authors are members of a specific ‘generation’ within this minority, the so-called third generation of Jewish American (Holocaust) writers, as discussed in chapter 1. That is why the sociologic background is of interest for my research. Aleida Assmann states: “sociologists are interested in communal memories and narratives within their social contexts, such as one finds in groups with a similar background of experience, or in intergenerational exchanges within families” (ibid.). What constitutes communal memories and a communal background for the very heterogeneous group of Jewish Americans and how/whether this is represented in third generation Jewish American literature is one question of my work. The similar background of experiences and intergenerational exchange, within and outside of families, are both tied closely to the aspect of memory and to the question of how memory is preserved and passed on. Contemporary historical research, according to Aleida Assmann, “investigates reliability of human memory” (ibid.). This discipline, History, is not the only one asking questions about memory reliability. Literary Fiction also deals with representation and reliability of memory. The works of third generation Jewish American writers are examples of representation of different kinds of memory. One important topic represented

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18 Original German title: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*.

19 Original German title: *Erinnerungsräume, Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*.

in these novels in connection with memory is the Holocaust. Other aspects of memory, such as the storage of memory in writing, and family related memory are also represented in her novels. In order to be able to analyze representations of different kinds of memory in fiction, different basic categories of memory are introduced and defined in this chapter.

Jan Assmann considers current times, roughly pre- to post-millennial, a transitional period in which three combined factors put increased focus on the aspect of *memory* in Western and Eastern scholarly practice (vii). Factors he mentions are, first, the rise of the new media, referring to digital media (ibid.) such as the computer and the Internet. These create new storage possibilities, and the ensuing consequences can be likened in relative importance to the cultural revolution caused by the invention of the printing press or, earlier, the invention of writing itself (ibid.). Masses of stored data are suddenly available worldwide and digital storage space takes on ever expandable dimensions, as predicted by U.S. American futurist Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* in 1970. Toffler addresses questions of choice of what to remember in an age of what he terms “information overload” (340), for example.

The dangers of relying on storage media other than the human brain have been criticized ever since Plato, who was of the opinion that writing would weaken human memory (A. Assmann *Introduction* 173, paraphrasing Plato, *Phaedros*). “Today we rely on our Google memory,” states Aleida Assmann, “in a world where information is out-of-date almost as soon as it reaches us, swift access to data has become more important than the possession of knowledge” (ibid.). This raises the question of who is in charge of the information flow, for example information on the Internet. Whoever controls the content, the flow, and the availability of information has concentrated power over aspects of a society. The ongoing struggle of which knowledge is to be remembered, and in which form, is addressed specifically in chapter 2.4.

The second factor, emphasizing memory in scholarly practice, according to Jan Assmann, is Western cultural tradition now being “permeated by what George Steiner has called a ‘post-culture’” (vii). By the term ‘post-culture’, Steiner (cf. 1-13) generally refers to the definition of what ‘culture’ can mean after the “temporal divide” (Goldfarb xxiii) of the Holocaust and its relapse into ‘barbarism’ of a so-called ‘cultured’ or ‘civilized’ European society.

The third factor mentioned by Jan Assmann is the one he deems the most important and claims is affecting “our very lives as individuals” (vii). He is referring to the events of the WW II, and especially the Holocaust:

A generation of contemporary witnesses to some of the most terrible crimes and catastrophes in the whole of human history is now dying out. Generally, a period of 40 years is regarded as the threshold beyond which the collective

memory begins to fade: the recollections of the living become fewer and fewer, and the various forms of cultural memory become problematical. (ibid.)

This loss of witnesses and the aspect of supporting lasting collective memory in fiction are topics currently debated extensively by contemporary scholars. These topics are major aspects of third generation Jewish American writing and lie at the heart of this work.

For an analysis of the representation of *memory* in third generation Jewish American writing, it is necessary to introduce and define memory terminology. Therefore, introductory aspects of memory research with a focus on memory in fiction are given in this chapter. The general theoretical background on memory utilized in my work draws heavily on Aleida Assmann's expertise. This chapter introduces memory categories as defined by her. Employing these categories, memory issues in connection with symbolic characters and objects in exemplary third generation Jewish American authors' works are analyzed in chapters three and four of this work.

One of several thematic foci of third generation Jewish American writing analyzed in chapters three and four is the representation of Holocaust memory. This is mostly traumatic memory. Trauma terminology with regard to fiction as defined by Dominic LaCapra and Patrick Duggan, among others, is thus explained in sub-chapter 2.2. Sub-chapter 2.3, "Holocaust Trauma, Memory and Representation", discusses the question of whether the Holocaust can be represented at all, possible dangers in representation, and, most pressing, the way in which the Holocaust can be commemorated by current and future generations. The loss of the eye-witness generation is a most dire concern of scholars with regard to the last question. When the eye-witness generation is gone, the focus will be on witness-witnesses, and on documents and objects left by witnesses, but also on commemoration in fiction.

As memory is always a (re-)construction, possible struggles of memory are addressed in connection with Raymond Williams' theories on cultural processes in sub-chapter 2.4, "Power Struggles of Memory". This is done with regard to memory in identity construction on an individual level and political interest in memory on a collective level. The discussion of the Holocaust as an American or even a global collective memory is introduced. As Jewish migrants have carried their Holocaust memory with them, the space of the actual event loses relevance in comparison to the global idea of memory of the event helping in keeping something similar from ever happening again, anywhere.

## 2.1 Memory Studies and Memory Categories

Aleida Assmann stresses the recently rising importance of *memory* in cultural studies, calling memory a “trans-disciplinary paradigm,” a distinct concept or thought pattern, connecting such diverse fields of study as neurology, psychology, sociology, history, political science, and art and literature (*Introduction* 167). The focus of memory in literature, according to Assmann, lies on “‘cultural memory’ that has built up a long-term cultural heritage” through books (*ibid.*).

Memory terminology used in this work is defined and summarized in the following, mostly as presented in Aleida Assmann’s 2012 *Introduction to Cultural Studies*. For more specific definitions and examples, her volume *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization—Functions, Media, Archives*, is a major work which I refer to throughout. The aspect of trauma, as a specific kind of memory recently having moved into the focus of psychology and other fields, is treated separately.

Aleida Assmann begins discussing memory by pointing out the various meanings the English word can bear: “remembrance, recall, recollection, reminiscence, souvenir, commemoration and memorization,” for example (*Introduction* 168). She generally differentiates between memory as *ars* and *vis*: memory as an art form in the act of memorization, or mnemotechnics (*Cultural Memory* 17), and “memory as bestower of identity,” as “the process of remembering” (*Cultural Memory* 19). Both terms gain clarity with the help of further terminological explanation.

The most important characteristic of human memory is its unreliability. It is “always distorted by the limitations of our perspective, our perception, our needs and our emotions,” and never delivers a perfect reproduction of the past (Assmann *Introduction* 169). Memories change through *reconstructions* over time, to “adapt our self-image to the requirements of the present,” (*ibid.*). Assmann is referring to the field of psychology where this perception of human memory originates: Humans actively, but largely unconsciously, re-create or re-construct their memories according to their personal needs. This leads to so-called ‘false’ memories. The term ‘false’ memory is misleading insofar as they are reconstructions of what the rememberer thinks to be true.

Major aspects of memory are defined in pairs by Assmann. The ones most commonly referred to and of relevance for this work are the following four memory pairs: *active* and *passive memory*, *episodic* and *semantic memory*, *embodied* and *disembodied memory*, and *individual* and *collective memory*. The aspect of *trauma* is discussed separately in chapter 2.2, along with important neologisms accompanying trauma discussion.

*Active memory* is called “I-memory” by Aleida Assmann, signifying that it is “the product of a deliberate (re-)construction of the past, which is

brought in line with the self-image of the person concerned" (*Introduction* 170). It is what humans experience and *want* to remember. This demonstrates the close link between identity formation and memory, as, like they do with memory, humans willfully *construct* their identity, and active memory helps them in piecing together a wanted identity.

*Passive memory*, termed "*me-memory*" by Assmann, in contrast, is "inaccessible, unstructured, and uncontrollable; its content can never be captured in its entirety, and its dynamic movements can never be steered" (*ibid.*). Both active and passive memory can take place simultaneously. Active memory is 'made' consciously, voluntarily, while passive memory 'happens' mostly unconsciously and involuntarily. As a specific example for passive, unconscious, *me-memory* in literature, Assmann names Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927)<sup>20</sup>, calling him "the great discoverer and reporter" of passive memory (*ibid.*). His example of a piece of food bringing back a "flood" of involuntary memories "has become the embodiment of the *mémoire involontaire*" (*ibid.*). This kind of involuntary memory is activated by signals, for example "through objects that emit sensory impulses" (*ibid.*). A taste is only one of many possible triggers. A sound, smell, shape, or color could equally trigger *mémoire involontaire*.

The psychological category of *episodic memory* which is used for autobiographical memory is the term most commonly referred to with regard to memory. As stated already, episodic memory is re-constructed, it largely consists of what happens to humans and especially what they wish to incorporate into their identity. The aspect of (re-)constructed memory has found its way into art such as movies and literature, according to Assmann, in the form of "flashbacks, distortions and false memories" (*ibid.*). "Instead of the 'unreliable narrator' we now have what one might call the 'unreliable rememberer,'" states Assmann, naming postmodern authors employing this aesthetic principle, such as Salman Rushdie and Julian Barnes (*ibid.*). The unreliable rememberer tells readers about personal memories but cannot be trusted, as the memories may be consciously or unconsciously altered and are always, to some degree, (re-)constructed. This postmodern kind of character type, in its factual inconsistencies and erratic recounts, is of interest for later analysis of Jewish American writing in this work, as several 'unreliable rememberers' are introduced in the category of symbolic ghost characters in chapters three and four.

The absolutism with which *all* memory is deemed unreliable by psychologists is viewed critically by some writers. Assmann exemplarily names Margaret Atwood, who challenges the "postmodern principle of unreliability of memory" (*ibid.*): "If the 'I' of now has nothing to do with the 'I' of then, where did the 'I' of now come from? Nothing is made of nothing, or

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20 English title: *In Search of Lost Time* or *Remembrance of Things Past*.

so we used to believe,” asks Atwood (12 ff., quoted in Assmann *Introduction* 171). This criticism is certainly justified with regard to the aspect of development of literary characters. Well rounded literary characters usually are not in a state of stasis, but undergo challenges and changes. In order to discuss identity, one must also discuss personal development that has formed an identity. For examples, one can ask questions about what has caused a character to re-construct their episodic memory in specific ways, thereby establishing connections between an incident and re-constructed memory pertaining to it. Literature is able to construct, present, and clearly exemplify these complexities.

*Semantic memory*, paired with episodic memory as a counterpart by Assmann, contains what humans acquire “through targeted learning” (*Introduction* 171). Cognitive knowledge in human semantic memory gained thus, such as the order of the alphabet, for example, “is exempt from the psychological principle of unreliability and the need for permanent reconstruction” (ibid.). That means there is a form of reliable, factual memory. It is possible, however, that this kind of memory, partly or completely disappears (ibid.), e.g. via head injury or illness. The semantic memory can be trained with various methods and is vital to learning.

*Procedural memory* is a third system identified by psychologists, according to Assmann (*Introduction* 172). It describes something learned like riding a bicycle or swimming that, once learned, the body can do without conscious effort of the brain, an *embodied* or *habitualized memory* (ibid.).

*Disembodied memory*, on the other hand, is memory translated “into semiotic codes like language, or into images,” and committed to external storage, such as writing (*Introduction* 173). Semantic memory, thus, can be ‘disembodied’. These two “realms” of memory, *functional* and *storage* memory, make up a society’s *cultural memory*, according to Assmann (ibid.). While storage memory can be called “society’s passive memory,” (ibid.) “[f]unctional memory, on the other hand, is the active memory of a we-group,” states Assmann, and forms the basis for “collective identity” (ibid.).

The term collective identity suggests the existence of *collective memory*, as well. The memory forms discussed so far were defined on an individual level, as individual memory. Collective identity and collective memory are constructs, even more so than on an individual level. Maurice Halbwachs’ pioneer work in social memory research makes the important claim that “memories are anchored socially and form the communicative and emotional cement of a group” (Assmann *Introduction* 175 paraphrasing Halbwachs). Common links, binding for the community, as Assmann sums up, “give [...] collectives their identity as ‘we’” (ibid.), for example acquired through learning, e.g. participation in rituals.

Today the term collective memory is mainly used in connection with ethnic groups, or nations (cf. *ibid.*). Assmann stresses that “such units do not *have*, but *make*, a collective memory, with the help of symbolic media like texts, images, monuments, anniversaries” (*ibid.*). Nietzsche’s *monumental historiography*, “concerned with constructing a heroic self-image of the political ‘we’-group, and mythically enhanced through negative images of the enemy,” has been counterbalanced since the 1990s, according to Assmann, when nations “began to reflect on their historic guilt, and through public confessions to incorporate a ‘negative memory’ into their self-image” (*Introduction* 175). Examples for monumental historiography can be found in the Nazis’ nationalistic fascist we-group construction.

Germany’s reflection on its historic guilt, for example, did not begin in the 1990s but immediately post-WW II. However, one can argue that this was mainly an (en-)forced reflection ordered and facilitated by the Allies. They forced prisoners of war and ordinary citizens to walk through liberated concentration camps and immediately began prosecuting war criminals in Nuremberg. What Aleida Assmann refers to with regard to the 1990s is a beginning of coming to terms with the guilt of colonialism, for example through public and official acknowledgement of the wrongs done to indigenous peoples in former (British) colonies.

Further forms of collective memory discussed by Aleida Assmann are *cultural* memory and *communicative* memory: “[c]ultural memory [...] transcends eras and is supported by normative texts, and communicative memory [...] generally links three generations through memories passed on by word of mouth” (*Cultural Memory* 4). An example Aleida Assmann gives of a normative text supporting cultural memory is the Bible (*ibid.*). Communicative memory is the memory passed on orally or in bodily forms of communication of such a group as the family, for example.

## 2.2 Trauma

Trauma is a term that, medically, can refer to two different phenomena: it can describe a severe physical injury, like a massive blow to the head, or a specific kind of extreme psychological injury. Physical trauma can result in irretrievable loss of memory through injury of the brain. Trauma in the sense of a severe psychological injury is a result of witnessing or experiencing severe (physical) violence. This chapter is concerned with trauma in the sense of the second definition, the *psychological trauma* (for etymology and concise historical overview of understanding of trauma cf. trauma theatre scholar Patrick Duggan 13-16). “While trauma has been redefined and reconsidered over many decades, there is still no single definition or unified understanding of it,” states Duggan (21).



Cathy Caruth defines trauma as: “[...] an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth *Unclaimed Experience* 11, in Duggan 23). As Caruth states, the experience’s overwhelming impact is too much for the human brain to handle *while* it is experienced. Delayed response and the repetitive nature of responding memory, in the forms of sudden, recurring nightmares, for example, are typical signs of traumatization. “Unlike the pre-conscious to potentially conscious passive memory<sup>21</sup>,” says Aleida Assmann, “trauma is related to an experience that is so incomprehensible, humiliating, painful or life-threatening, that perception automatically closes its gates to such an intruder” (*Introduction* 175). This closing off of memory is then later actively aided by the attempt to suppress traumatic memory by some of those who suffer from it. This cannot be successful, however. Traumatic memory is not forgotten, only closed off. It will re-emerge after a certain period of time in different manifestations (cf. Assmann *Introduction* 176). “For the sake of self-protection, [traumatic memory] has been excluded and shut off in a separate compartment from the conscious mind,” according to Aleida Assmann (*Introduction* 175). This happens because it is a destructive threat to identity construction (ibid.). This threat to human identity construction remains, if trauma is suppressed continually. Trauma therapy suggests it is better to try to *work through* a trauma, meaning bringing it back to conscious remembering and trying to incorporate it into one’s identity, than to try to suppress it. “Trauma-events progressively destroy positive values of self and one’s sense of safety in the world through imaginative restagings of the original event in the mind of the sufferer” (Herman 51, in Duggan 22). A sense of safety is the second stage after mere physical survival through homeostasis in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as put forward in his “Theory of Human Motivation” in 1943. With the sense of safety destroyed, human life beyond mere existence is extremely difficult to accomplish. That is why trauma constitutes a long term problem which needs to be treated in order to restore the possibility of a ‘normal’ kind of life.

Possible causes for trauma can be war, the witnessing, experiencing, or committing of violence, such as rape, torture, and killing. Societies at war are confronted with traumatization of soldiers and civilians on a large scale. Terrorist attacks like suicide bombings can also leave witnesses and victims traumatized. Every trauma differs individually; however, the symptoms fol-

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21 Although Aleida Assmann stresses the difference between passive memory and trauma, it is important to note that passive memory in the form of *mémoire involontaire* can, however, trigger trauma memory in sufferers.

low very similar patterns, which is why no particular differentiation is made in psychology with regard to the causes of traumata.

Patrick Duggan suggests several new terms in order to describe the nature of psychological trauma better: Instead of 'victim' or 'survivor', he uses the term "survivor-sufferer" (24). This term aptly stresses that with the passing of the traumatic event, the trauma *continues* for the person having experienced it. In fact, it only even *begins* after the event, as in the moment of experience, it is not acknowledged as trauma. Therefore, Duggan also proposes the terms "trauma-event" for the initial experience and "trauma-symptoms" for the conscious re-experience(s), as opposed to the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (23). PTSD, although it is the commonly used term to describe trauma symptoms, does not aptly describe the situation the survivor-sufferers are in. The trauma, to them, is not over. In that sense, there is no such thing to them as a post- or after-traumatic experience. The trauma-event is experienced again and again, for example in the form of "flashbacks, physical/muscle memories, nightmares and behavioural re-enactment" (Duggan 25).

Sigmund Freud was the first to formulate the concepts of "compulsion to repeat" and "working through" with regard to memory in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through. Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II"<sup>22</sup> (150/155). They constitute two different modes of dealing with recurring memory we now call traumatic memory or trauma-symptomatic memory. Dominick LaCapra has taken up these terms in connection with trauma. He focuses specifically on Holocaust trauma and on representation of trauma in fiction in his work. As Uyttershout and Versluys point out: "Since LaCapra's reintegration of the Freudian terms 'acting out' or *melancholia* and 'working through' or mourning in the field of trauma studies (LaCapra 1994, 2001), this dichotomy has become the default theoretical groundwork for working with trauma in literature" (216). LaCapra describes post-traumatic 'acting out' as something "in which one is *haunted* or *possessed* by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop" (*Writing History* 21, my italics). This 'feedback loop' leads to time not being properly processed by the traumatized person; there is no past, present, or future, only the past (ibid.).

'Working through', on the other hand,

is an articulate practice: to the extent one works through trauma [...], one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that

22 Original 1914 German title: "Weitere Ratschläge zur Technik der Psychoanalyse (II): Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten".

something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (LaCapra *Writing History* 22)

While 'working through' does not necessarily lead to closure, it can oppose compulsive repetition to some extent, according to LaCapra (ibid.). He also stresses his conviction that 'acting-out' and 'working through' are related parts of one process (in Goldberg 2). 'Working through' is a desirable state to be reached by survivor-sufferers because it can help them to lead a more normal life. However, it is sometimes the case that survivor-sufferers refuse to 'work through' their traumatic experience "because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma" (ibid.). By this, LaCapra means that the survivors identify with the victims who did not survive and would see it as a betrayal to come to terms with what happened, while the dead never had that chance (ibid.). This can lead to the phenomenon of survivor guilt, for example, which is not uncommon in the context of Holocaust trauma.

Aleida Assmann uses Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* to exemplify different kinds of memory in literature. Hamlet learns that his father was murdered, which deeply disturbs him. When Hamlet insists on mourning his dead father, this is

part of an implicit contract between generations, which guarantees the bond between past and future and the continuity of tradition and culture. [...] if the mourning and the rituals have not been properly performed, dead people may return to haunt the living and bring misery into their lives. (*Introduction* 180)

Hamlet's father, not properly mourned by all, returns as a ghost to haunt the living. This is reminiscent of how LaCapra describes the haunting nature of trauma (*Writing History* 21). Another aspect similar to the trauma aspect of 'acting out' in LaCapra is the "pathological time structure that characterizes the play," according to Assmann (*Introduction* 180). She goes on to discuss an interesting point made by psychoanalyst Nicholas Abraham, who

attributes the injuries and threatening effect of the past to a malign complex of guilt, concealment and ignorance which does not end with the death of the perpetrator but is passed on unconsciously to succeeding generations. This complex makes its presence felt as a gap in the knowledge of the successor into which he projects his own fantasies. (ibid.)

Gaps and blanks in memory, and passing on of memory, are a topic that returns, thematically and with regard to narrative analysis in connection with Holocaust representation, in chapters three and four of this work. "This transgenerational trauma can be called a 'memoria negativa', with the nega-

tive element being transferred unarticulated from parents to children" (Assmann *Introduction* 181). The third generation Jewish American novels discussed in detail in chapters three and four contain aspects of unarticulated transgenerational traumata. The most prominent one discussed is the Holocaust, for example in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, and Krauss' *The History of Love* and *Great House*. Other causes of unarticulated transgenerational trauma represented are, for example, World War II and September 11 experiences in Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Israeli war experiences in *Great House*. Interestingly, the most problematic cases represented are transgenerational issues between generations one and two.

The relatively new term *trauma novel*, used by Aleida Assmann and others, describes an old phenomenon. Traumatized protagonists have long existed in fiction, one example coming to mind, and mentioned among others by Assmann, being Septimus Warren Smith, in Virginia Woolf's 1925 *Mrs. Dalloway*. Septimus, a young WW I veteran who is *shell-shocked*, as war trauma was then called, and driven to suicide, is only one prominent literary example of many.

Neologisms are continuously being created with regard to trauma representation and discussion: Toni Morrison's word *re-memory* describes the "static recurrence of traumatic images and the need to renew these by handing them down to the next generation", and her term *disremembering* stands for "a state between remembering and forgetting, describing the status of trauma" (Assmann *Introduction* 169). Both terms are coined in her 1987 novel *Beloved*, incidentally dealing with the ghost figure of a daughter returning from the dead to haunt her traumatized African American mother in the U.S. American post-Civil War era.

## 2.3 Holocaust Trauma, Memory, and Representation

The Holocaust is the biggest collective trauma event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the Western world. Aleida Assmann calls the Holocaust a collective historical trauma, stressing its *after-effects* which can be 'inherited' by subsequent generations (*Introduction* 176). Assmann mentions second and third generation members of the perpetrators, "suffering under the guilt of their forebears in the form of psychic disturbances" (*ibid.*). The focus of research, however, is and should be on helping *victims* and understanding after-effects on them and following generations. A 2013 neuro-biological study on mice (Callaway, referring to Dias and Ressler) suggests that indeed emotions like fear, experienced by parents, can be directly inherited by the next and subsequent generations of descendants. The memory of fear, the study

suggests, is passed on epigenetically without the next generation having experienced the particular trigger in a frightening context (*ibid.*). That is, (mouse) children experience their parents' fears, not having experienced the source of it themselves. Certainly, an existential fear resulting from traumatization would be a fear passed on genetically. If the same deductions can be made for humans, this would explain experienced anxiety in second and later generational descendants of people suffering from (Holocaust) trauma. Understanding these biological mechanisms will, hopefully, lead to a more effective treatment of trauma.

These findings in the natural sciences stress the importance of a memory culture with regard to traumata in general and a huge, collective trauma such as the Holocaust in particular, as it becomes clear that subsequent generations are affected not only by choice of intellectual engagement in history, but by their genetic inheritance, if they have perpetrator- or victim- predecessors. Holocaust memory culture must serve, on the one hand, to commemorate the *trauma-event*, and on the other hand, must establish ongoing active discussion of the event to help the process of 'working through' *trauma-symptoms*.

Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch, with regard to Holocaust memory of the second generation, coined the term *postmemory* as describing "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (103). This aspect of 'deeply transmitted experiences' preempts the findings of the later biological study. "Postmemory is not identical to memory; it is 'post,' but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force," clarifies Hirsch (109). She quotes Eva Hoffman, who, as a member of the second generation, speaks of hers as a 'hinge generation': "The guardianship of the Holocaust is being passed on to us. The second generation is the hinge generation in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth" (Hoffman, quoted in Hirsch 103). A further memory term connecting to what Hirsch calls postmemory is "prosthetic memory," being attributed to Landsberg and Lury with regard to photographs and memory.

While this hinge generation has a 'living connection' (a term used by Hirsch, as well as Jan and Aleida Assmann) to the first generation, all later generations' connections become more and more indirect. Two dangers become apparent as a consequence. To express it in extremes: The Holocaust could be *forgotten*, or its memory could become unrecognizably *distorted*. Eva Hoffmann, for example, creates the term *hypermemory*, when discussing general dangers of distortion in later generations' Holocaust fiction. "For Hoffman," writes Workman, "the Holocaust is in danger less of 'van-

ishing into forgetfulness' than of 'expanding into an increasingly empty referent'" (Workman 8, quoting Hoffman 177).

The danger of forgetting seems indeed the lesser one: Gross and Rohr quote Peter Novick, for example, who, in his study *The Holocaust in American Life*, says that "[t]he Holocaust as virtually the only common denominator of American Jewish identity in the late twentieth century, has filled a need for a consensual symbol" (Gross/Rohr 55 quoting Novick 7). While this statement indicates that the Holocaust is unlikely to be forgotten, it is, however, a very negative way of defining a collective identity. It is challenged by Berel Lang, who rightfully claims that the foundation of the state of Israel is a common Jewish denominator also meaningful to (American) Jews, therefore making the negative impact of the Holocaust not the only common, or consensual symbol of contemporary Judaism (6). The focus on *American Jews*, however, already presents an opportunity for distortion, as discussed in the next sub-chapter on memory struggle.

A question that has been discussed at great length in and about literature is whether the Holocaust can be *represented* at all, even by eye-witnesses. This is debated heatedly with regard to facts and is yet a more controversial discussion with regard to fiction. Adorno's dictum about writing poetry after Auschwitz being barbaric, proclaimed and later relativized, is not the only statement critical of Holocaust fiction. Gross and Rohr point to Berel Lang's work on Holocaust representation for discussion of "the incompatibility of the Holocaust with aesthetic conventions and the humanistic values on which they depend" (11). If an event defies prevalent aesthetic conventions, representation according to these conventions becomes impossible.

However, the creative medium of language can establish new forms of representation. Lyotard's statement on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust expresses the difficulty of "the task of representing the unrepresentable" (Gross/Rohr 12). If an earthquake destroyed not only lives, buildings and objects, but also instruments to measure it, he states, "[t]he impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force" (Lyotard 56, quoted in Gross/Rohr 12). According to Lyotard, therefore, the event deemed unrepresentable in all its facets still inspires ideas of possible, if vague, representations. Holocaust fiction, like factual representation, if it cannot grasp the entire magnitude of the event, can at least give an idea of it, and strive for the most representational authenticity possible. Memory and commemoration of a specific topic necessarily encompass some kind of reference to or representation of the topic. As the relevance of transmitting Holocaust memory is hardly doubted, the question, thus, is not *whether* the Holocaust can be represented, but *how* this can be done, for the sake of its commemoration. Authors of the third generation, who are, generationally,

twice removed from the actual witnesses, continue to write fiction with complementary Holocaust-related plotlines. Lyotard's statement may serve as an explanation for and a justification of the significance of this endeavor. The themes and narrative form which some of these authors, such as Nicole Krauss, have chosen is discussed in chapters three and four.

According to Aleida Assmann there is a "current crisis of testimony based on the *experiential memory* of a rapidly dwindling number of witnesses who survived the greatest of all 20<sup>th</sup>-century catastrophes, the Holocaust" (*Cultural Memory* 4, her italics). In her work, Assmann repeatedly refers to the Holocaust and its representation, either in written form as testimony or as portrayed in fiction, with regard to trauma, as connected to places such as Auschwitz. With regard to the question whether *experiential memory* is needed in the creation of cultural memory I argue that the 'crisis of testimony' formulated by Assmann is met by contemporary Jewish American writers dealing with the Holocaust as an aspect of their work. They create a *fictitious* or a *potential* past in their fictitious recreation of events. Thus, despite being twice removed from the eye-witness generation, they make a contribution to cultural memory of the Holocaust. Literature, the written word, is used as a system of storage of memory, in this case *fictitious* memory, of a historical event. "NON OMNIS MORIAR" is the motto in the illustration on the cover of Aleida Assmann's 2011 volume on cultural memory, quoting Horace and meaning that not everything will die, i.e. be forgotten, for example not the words that are written down in various storage media, or better: committed to a common cultural memory. This is something literature can accomplish. Literature stores memory, for example in the form of fictitious memory or *historiographic metafiction* (cf. Linda Hutcheon). Re-imagined historical characters, for example, can carry symbolic value in fiction with regard to memory, as is shown in chapter three.

Writers of the third generation stand in a tradition of first and second generation writers. Historical facts are known to them and they are familiar with the eye-witness accounts. First generation eye-witnesses have written down their memories and are not tiring of discussing their personal fate, representative of millions of European Jews, for as long as they are able to. The passing on or transition of their knowledge to further generations is of immediate interest to literary and cultural scholars. However, *fiction* can and does equally create a very important contribution to the culture of remembrance. I convey this in the analysis of several examples. As the tradition of transmitting the Holocaust as a literary topic continues, my research looks at works by third generation Jewish American writers making an important contribution to remembrance of the Holocaust with their fiction.

With regard to Holocaust representation in fiction, Jessica Lang makes some observations relevant in *third generation* Holocaust writing that are of

interest for this work. She discusses aspects of *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss, for example, and classifies Krauss' novel as "new generational" Holocaust fiction (Lang 45), starting to point out differences to previous generations' work:

[Third generation writers] serve as logical successors to the second generation of Holocaust writers. As such, these writers mark a second transition, or another remove from the eyewitness: the first transition from eyewitness to a recounting by the witness now becomes, as the Holocaust enters history, an *indirect* relation to the original eyewitness. (Lang 46)

She goes on to compare the experiential intensity of first- and second generation Holocaust representations to the representations of third generation authors, who, to her, "view[ ] these events [pertaining to the Holocaust] as an indirect part of the narrative, one balanced by other, also important, histories," (ibid.). Lang, calling them 'indirect' or 'balancing plotlines,' and Workman using the term "competing narratives" (7), are both referring to what Emily Budick has termed "Holocaust-inflected" writing (216). This latter term appears to be the most apt one to date. As the word 'balancing,' however, suggests that Holocaust narrative *needs* something to counterweigh it, the term 'competition' invokes a rather undignified struggle for attention, and even the word 'inflected' proposes a certain drawing or pushing force toward the Holocaust narrative, I propose yet a different term. *Complementary narrations* expresses best, in my opinion, how third generation Jewish American writers such as Nicole Krauss give Holocaust material and further plotlines equal gravitas and space in their novels.

## 2.4 Power Struggles of Memory

As David Lowenthal addresses in his 1985 work *The Past is a Foreign Country*<sup>23</sup>, and as his title suggests, 'the past' is something that people in 'the present' cannot truly be familiar with. In fact, there is no such thing as one certain, definitive past. Therefore, absolute factual knowledge of the past, meaning the time before an individual consciousness develops, is not possible. Collective human (hi-)stories about the past cannot be 100% accurate, because, as memory is always a (re-)construction, so is 'the past'. Memory of individuals about their past is equally reconstructed in individual human memory. Any representation of the past is a reconstruction and conflicts of interest influence it on personal and collective levels. What is remembered and what is forgotten, individually and collectively, is negotiated actively

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23     quoting L.P. Hartley's opening phrase of *The Go-Between* (1953): "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."



and passively. Which memory is considered a 'dominant' aspect of current culture, for example, is not necessarily clear and fixed. Like every aspect of culture, memory is subject to change. The past is gone. It being over is part of its attraction in terms of nostalgia (cf. Hewison and Lowenthal). On the other hand, negative past events are something people want to forget.

Power struggles in memory happen permanently on an individual basis, in an individual's memory, in the formation of identity as a composite of various forms of active, passive, semantic, and episodic memory in ever re-constructed forms. On a collective level, memory related power struggles take place in so far as to who 'says' what is to be collectively remembered, and commemorated, and how. In his chapter "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent" in *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams describes the complexity of culture. He explains the variability of cultural *processes*, especially with regard to their connection to past and future, and their transitional nature, by using three general terms for topicality stages of cultural aspects: *dominant*, *residual*, and *emergent* (ibid.). These three terms, to Williams, describe "the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements" (121). Cultural processes and their levels of presence in a society directly reflect power struggles of memory. What constitutes a dominant aspect of a culture, and is therefore to be remembered, and what is only incorporated as something residual, or what is new and therefore emergent, is established and formed by dynamic interrelations of such elements as traditions and institutions (ibid.). For example, collective memory can be dictated, such as under absolute regimes, or collectively decided upon by an elected group, as in democratic processes.

In his chapter "The Multiplicity of Writing," Williams states that "[l]iterary theory cannot be separated from cultural theory" (145). I agree, as literature represents and reflects cultural processes. The power struggle of aspects in culture pointed out by Williams, in my opinion, in addition to applying to the struggle of memories, also applies to memory *representation* in fiction. For this reason, I use Williams' three terms *dominant*, *residual*, and *emergent* to indicate the topicality of themes analyzed in third generation Jewish American literature in chapters three and four. The Holocaust and its symbolic representation as a historic event is the starting point of my analyses of symbolic characters in chapter three and of symbolic objects in chapter four. Reflecting power struggles of memory, what I call 'symbolic ghost characters' appear in contemporary Jewish American writing as *residual* aspects, as I go on to show in both chapters. Analysis of writing as a *dominant* theme constitutes the second part of both chapters three and four, while analysis of family representation as an *emergent* topic gaining importance rounds off both chapters.

The inherent struggle within individual *trauma*, the struggle between a trauma-event's suppression and its 'working through', is mirrored in the collective treatment of traumatic memory. It took years for the Holocaust as a collective trauma to be widely discussed in public, for example. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, as reported about by Hannah Arendt, is deemed the landmark event opening up public debate of the traumatic events. Part of the power struggle of Holocaust memory, as discussed, is the question of whether the Holocaust, and its memory, can be aptly represented. Another, more recent example for power struggles in memory is the current discussion of whether the Holocaust has become an *American* memory by appropriation, as some critics propose. Going even further, some memory scholars state that the Holocaust has become a *global* memory. This can be seen as a negative development, with regard to a universalizing approach, as the uniqueness of the Holocaust is one of its features that, for many, defies any ubiquitous appropriation. On the other hand, appropriation of an event like the Holocaust, in order to avoid anything similar from happening again, is seen as positive and legitimate by many.

The Holocaust, *the* European tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is originally a European memory. It happened in Europe and its perpetrators and victims were Europeans. The Allied Forces winning the war against Nazi Germany and reinstating peace and order in Europe were an inspiration for many surviving Jews to migrate to the United States, especially since then-Palestine was not yet to be entered legally. Migration of those who witnessed the Holocaust carried this memory to the immigrant nations, mainly Israel and the USA: "As migrants carry their heritage, memories and traumas with them, these are transferred and brought into new social constellations and political contexts" (Assmann/Conrad 2). This process is aided further by "global tourism and the worldwide exchange of academic discourses" (Assmann/Conrad 2/3).

Gross and Rohr ask: "Is the Holocaust an American Memory?" (29). There are many voices and a variety of opinions on whether or not this is the case and if so, whether or not it is an acceptable appropriation. Aleida Assmann mentions that the American Country Report to the ITF<sup>24</sup>, for example, "stated that in the US the Holocaust is taught 'as a part of US history'" ("The Holocaust" 103). For Assmann this means that "European History is largely shaped by American perspectives and standards" (ibid.). She is critical of this, as "such an 'Americanization' of the Holocaust tends to disregard the local sites and contexts, rendering the events more and more abstract" (ibid.). Assmann and Conrad say that "[u]nder the impact of globalizing processes, both the spaces of memory and the composition of memory communities

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24 ITF: International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, Stockholm, 2000.

have been redefined" (1). They argue that "the collective memory of the nation was at the center of memory debates" and that this has changed with globalization under the influence of its characteristic, mobility (2). Aleida Assmann, after talking about the so-called Americanization of the Holocaust, goes one step further by rhetorically asking whether the Holocaust has become a global memory and a "universal norm" ("The Holocaust" 105). As Conrad puts it, "Aleida Assmann deals with the Holocaust as the paradigmatic case in which the collective memory has broken up the national container and emerged as global memory" (11). The shift of the (European) Holocaust to being viewed as an *American* memory, on to a *global* or *universal* memory, is a good example of the redefinition of space and memory community mentioned above. For the analysis of fiction dealing with the memory of the Holocaust, this is to be taken into consideration.

It becomes discernible that the fields of *memory* and *identity* are not separable, as memory contributes to identity. Equal shifts as the ones described in the conception of memory are to be found in the studies of identity concerning globalization. Counter-globalization movements specifically stress a citizen-of-the-world attitude as opposed to national pride. Assman and Conrad state that

'The Holocaust,' holds the Israeli historian Tom Segev, 'no longer belongs exclusively to Israel and the Jews. Today, it belongs to the whole world.' The cross-border appropriation of the Holocaust – frequently also incorporated into national memories – allows for the reframing of a particular event in terms of a universalized memory of humanity. (8)

This is a point Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider make, as well. They evoke a trend of what they call "cosmopolitan memory" with regard to Holocaust memory, which is, in the eyes of some critics, exaggerating the extent to which the Holocaust is truly universally noted. Many Asian or African countries, for example, have their own memories of genocides they deem *their* biggest catastrophes. Thus, Assmann and Conrad are doubtful that the Holocaust is universally acknowledged to the extent that Levy and Sznaider suggest. They, and others, hold the point of view that the "Nazi genocide of the European Jews was a particular event, and its mourning is rooted in a specific place and cultural tradition – and thus it cannot easily be appropriated elsewhere" (Assmann/Conrad 8).

Around the change of the millennium, the concept of the nation has lost some of its primary status in the Western world. However, groups and alliances are still very much ordered according to old political structures, as the recent conflict among pro-European and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine (cf. Yuhas) and nationalist movements in many European nations show.

### 3. Symbolic Characters and Memory

As stated, three themes are discussed in this work with regard to the representation of memory in third generation Jewish American fiction: Holocaust and war memory, writing and writers, and the family. Symbolic value is often attributed to characters in writing. In the third generation Jewish American literature analyzed, I discern the following three symbolic character types, tied to representation of the three themes. Raymond Williams' terms "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent" from *Marxism and Literature*, discussed earlier, are employed to describe the topicality of these three symbolic character types and themes, representative of their 'struggle' for cultural relevance:

**The Ghost:** This symbolic, ghost-like character, appearing in Holocaust and war related plotlines, represents an eye-witness to posterity of Holocaust suffering and remembrance. The *ghost* is a *residual* figure in third generation Jewish American literature. It is a character in Holocaust representation which is becoming 'balanced' by complementary plots set entirely in the present, instead of in the (Holocaust) past. These complementary plots direct attention away from the trauma of the Holocaust. This symbolic character is discussed in chapter 3.1.

**The Writer:** This symbolic character is representative of the theme of self-reflective writing in Jewish American literature. It represents the continuity of Jewish American writing tradition. The *writer* has been a prominent symbolic character in Jewish American literature, and is represented equally strongly in third generation Jewish American writing. Intertextual references to earlier Jewish American and other writers, as well as self-reflexivity about the writing process, are elements *dominant* in third generational Jewish American writing. This symbolic character is discussed in chapter 3.3.

**The Family-member:** The *emergent* (cf. Wade) theme of *family* is represented by different symbolic family-member characters, with an emphasis on father-child relationships in the literature analyzed. The family, represented as a group and also as individuals in a group, is an emergent topic in particular in Nicole Krauss' work insofar as its representation defies older, stereotypical representation, giving important insight into contemporary Jewish American societal aspects such as a divide in religious Jewish and secular Jewish orientation. The symbolic family member character is discussed in chapter 3.4.

These three symbolic character types can overlap. A character can be a *ghost* and a *writer*, for example, or a *writer* and a *family-member*, or all three. Usually, one perception dominates the character. All symbolic characters analyzed are connected to the aspect of memory. The ghost has a special sta-

tus, tied in with specific memory, that is, Holocaust memory. Symbolic *ghost* characters in two of Krauss' contemporaries', Jonathan Safran Foer and Shalom Auslander, are analyzed in the following. In taking a closer look at three novels by these authors, *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) by Jonathan Safran Foer, and *Hope: A Tragedy* (2012) by Shalom Auslander, I show that the symbolic characters and themes presented above are not isolated phenomena. They are to be found in all three third generation Jewish American writers' works I analyze, Foer's, Auslander's, and Krauss'.

Chapters 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 go on to examine these themes in detail in Krauss' novel *The History of Love* (2005). Symbolic characters of all three categories, ghosts, writers, and family members, are analyzed with regard to their representation and their symbolic value. The discussion of these symbolic characters also shows how the aspects of *writing* and *family* represent continuation of the process of (Holocaust) commemoration: *Writing* as a storage medium is able to form collective cultural memory on a larger scale. A *family* is a group forming collective memory, albeit on a smaller scale. In both forms, memory is passed on from the first generation to the second or further following generations. Holocaust memory, in this context, is an important aspect of Krauss' writing. It is, however, not the only and not the main aspect of memory represented in her work, as my analysis of her themes shows. Extended research surveying third generation Jewish American literature for these symbolic character types would generate an important follow-up project to my work<sup>25</sup>.

### 3.1 Ghosts from the Past – Symbolic Holocaust Characters

The symbolic ghost character in third generation Jewish American complementary Holocaust plotlines is a figure that appears like a *ghost from the past* in plotlines set in the immediately postmillennial 21st century. Lowenthal addresses what he calls certain “drawbacks” (xx) of the past, such as memory of negative incidents. “To endure present life,” he states, “we may want to forget or obliterate a malign or traumatic history” (ibid.). As the ghost figures, I argue, are symbols of memory of an extremely negative as-

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25 This thesis was written and conceived between 2011 and 2014. Emily Miller Budick's chapter “The Ghost of the Holocaust in the Construction of Jewish American Literature”, published in 2016 in *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, reaches many of the same conclusions simultaneously, affirming the discerned themes with regard to the authors and works covered here and beyond.

pect of the human past, the Holocaust, it is important to point out in this particular case the importance of remembering the negative in order for humanity not to repeat it. This may be painful and demanding on a personal level, but as trauma research shows, working through a trauma instead of actively suppressing it further, results in a better ability of dealing with it long term. The dictum “Never again!” referring to the Holocaust is one of the main motors behind the urgency with which Holocaust memory is promoted.

Ghost characters can be described in cultural terms as symbolic of *residual* cultural aspects, the term used by Williams in the definition of cultural aspects playing a diminishing or less powerful role in present day cultural practice and being overtaken by new, emergent practice viewed in what he calls “epochal analysis” (121). The three terms *residual*, *dominant*, and *emergent* are used by Williams to describe not necessarily a chronology of culturally important currents but rather a power struggle between different (political) views. These can follow one another chronologically or they can struggle for dominance at the same time. The symbolic ghost characters in third generation Jewish American writing are, despite their importance, residual figures.

Literature and literary studies can be understood “as political practice, and therefore as a form of representation of power”<sup>26</sup> as Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier points out (13), listing Foucault, Greenblatt, and other poststructuralists as well-renowned proponents of this thesis. The aspects of Holocaust memory and Holocaust representation are highly politicized ones. As discussed in chapter two on memory, there is a constant struggle between what is remembered and what is forgotten. The struggle of keeping Holocaust memory ‘alive’ is a struggle against death, among other opponents, as the last generation to eye-witness the Holocaust is slowly vanishing. It is, among others, a *political* struggle against re-emerging right wing fascism and other opponents such as radical, fundamental Islamists, requiring vigilance and effort. Holocaust literature endeavors to represent and thereby to commemorate the Holocaust. By calling the symbolic ghost characters in third generation Jewish American complementary Holocaust plotlines *residual*, I do not say the importance of the Holocaust is diminishing in third generation Jewish American writing. I rather see that the texts mirror, or repre-

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26 My translation, original text in Brusberg-Kiermeier’s doctoral dissertation *Körperinszenierungen in Shakespeares Historien*, concerned with representations of the body in literature, particularly in Shakespeare: “Stephen Greenblatt [et al. ...] begreifen Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft als politische Praxis und damit als Repräsentationsform von Macht im Sinne Michel Foucaults, [...]”

sent, in the sense of Foucault<sup>27</sup>, reality: The last survivors of the Holocaust are very old now. Once they are gone they are irretrievably so. What they leave behind is all that will be left. No one and *nothing* can truly take their place. Their memory and their commemoration, in testimony and in fiction, are residual aspects of dominant Western culture of Holocaust commemoration.

What Williams refers to generally with regard to the residual is true for postmillennial Holocaust memory: It is an “active manifestation of the residual (this being its distinction from the archaic) which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture” (122). While Williams uses the term residual to describe a cultural *habit*, with regard to the Holocaust I use it in the sense of a residual *memory*. As Williams puts it, “[a]ny culture includes available elements of its past but their place in the contemporary cultural process is profoundly variable” (ibid.). The Holocaust is ‘available’ in various commemorative forms, through testimony, documentation, images, monuments, commemorative services, and fiction, for example. Its memory is part of Western mainstream culture. It has a firm position in this culture now. However, as the term ‘variable’ suggests, this status of the Holocaust in Western society is not necessarily something that will remain. “It is in the incorporation of the actively residual—by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion—that the work of the selective tradition is especially evident,” states Williams (123). *Variability* and *selectiveness* imply the potential threat to memory, as also addressed by Aleida Assmann and others, that at some point this residual cultural aspect will be “reinterpreted”, “diluted” or “discriminated against” too much, and finally “excluded” completely from dominant culture, to use Williams’ terms once more. Exclusion, in this case, can be the result of an active political process, just as it can happen slowly over a long period of time, through passive, involuntary ‘forgetting’.

Literature about the Holocaust is influencing this struggle against active and passive exclusion positively around the millennial turn. Selective cultural tradition, however, “is very notable in the case of versions of ‘the literary tradition’, passing through selective versions of the character of literature to connecting and of what literature now is and should be,” states Williams (ibid.). This can be seen in the debate about representation of the Holocaust in fiction, as to whether accurate representation is possible at all.

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27 Brusberg-Kiermeier (13) specifically refers to Foucault’s understanding of *representation* in: Foucault, Michel. *Die Ordnung der Dinge. Eine Archäologie der Humanwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997. For an English translation see Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, a translation of *Les Mots et les Choses*, Editions Gallimard, 1966 (especially pp. 15/16 and pp.72-74, e-book version).



Fictitious works about the Holocaust, especially when created by later generations without direct experience, are viewed critically, movies even more so than novels. What literature about the Holocaust is, should, and should not be is thus constantly negotiated.

The following sub-chapters analyze the residual aspect of the Holocaust in the form of symbolic ghost characters in three works of third generation Jewish American fiction by writers Jonathan Safran Foer and Shalom Auslander. They serve as examples of trends in this generation's writing, namely, exemplarily, the inclusion of Holocaust-related material. The symbolic ghost characters analyzed are partly writers and family figures at the same time.

### 3.1.1 Ghosts in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*

In Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, one of the protagonists, a young Jewish American of the third generation called Jonathan Safran Foer like the author, sets out to Ukraine to find a woman in a photograph, called Augustine. Augustine supposedly saved his grandfather from the Nazis. Instead of finding Augustine, he and the people with him on his quest, find her sister, Lista, a Holocaust witness. The novel is entirely fictitious, not a memoir, as the protagonist's name and circumstances might suggest. The author's magico-realistic fictitious history of a Jewish shtetl called Trachimbrod<sup>28</sup> and references to the massacre of its Jewish citizens in *Everything is Illuminated* were inspired by reality, yet make no claims at representing historical facts. For the same reason, author and protagonist are not to be equated.

Foer's American protagonist, called "the hero" (*Everything* 6), goes to Eastern Europe to search for his roots in a fashionable American manner. Thus, in this case, the Holocaust is represented from an American's point of view. Nevertheless, in this fictitious journey, an original locale, Ukraine, is revisited. Another protagonist and the main narrator is the young Ukrainian Alexander Perchov, called Alex, unaware of his country's history with regard to the Holocaust. Alex is hired by the American as a guide, and eager is to impress him. Both are of the same age, born in 1977 (Foer *Everything* 1). Their journey can be called a *journey of initiation*, in the sense of Peter Fre-

28 *The Book of Past Occurrences*, a fictitious history of Trachimbrod, 1791-1942 in Foer, 2003. For a recount of the history of the original town of Trochenbrod, see *The Heavens are Empty. Discovering the Lost Town of Trochenbrod* by Avrom Bendavid-Val, with a foreword by Jonathan Safran Foer, made into a documentary movie, *Lost Town*, by Richard Goldgewicht and Jeremy Goldscheider. For extensive discussion of Foer's protagonists cf. Feuer and Griffiths.



ese, as both mature significantly throughout it, coming to conclusions about their roles in life. Gaining knowledge about their respective families' pasts and about the Holocaust contributes to their maturing. Alex is a funny protagonist, as he mangles the English language, using archaic and obscure expressions, for lack of better knowledge, which adds humor to the novel. This humoristic element functioning as comic relief balances the representation of horrific discoveries made about the Holocaust by the protagonists.

Nostalgic trips to "the Continent", "the Old Country" etc. are something young Americans undertake in order to see where their ancestors originated. The company Jonathan has booked for his trip to Ukraine and which employs the native Alex is called "Heritage Touring", and it is "the American office of Heritage Touring" specifically (Foer *Everything* 4), implying there is an entire industry catering to Americans touring Ukraine, searching for their (Eastern) European roots. In a different context, Robert Hewison's study called *The Heritage Industry. Britain in a Climate of Decline*, criticizes British nostalgia for its past as a glorious empire and the fact that there is an entire industry creating fake memories, as he argues, in order to keep the ordinary citizen oblivious of the economical decline of the country.

'Heritage Touring', the fictitious company in Foer's novel, consists of untrained personnel, and is of no help with regard to the protagonist's Holocaust research, as the older generation chooses to suppress their memory of it and the younger have not heard of it at all. It is, however, an organization that leads tourists to believe they will be shown aspects of their ancestors' past, basically scamming them out of their money. The 'heritage' that the tourists are sold, in this novel, consists of more or less nothing. The reason the British and U.S. American 'heritage industries' are successful is a yearning for nostalgia in both cultures. Even a terrible Holocaust past of their ancestors in Europe leaves Americans wondering about their families' places of origin, and tends to lead to a nostalgic gaze upon these places, despite a history of persecution. Foer's fictitious history of Trachimbrod serves this nostalgia in its narrative magic realism. It reads like a fairy tale from a long forgotten time. This is the past that tourists come to see, not the empty space of Ukrainian contemporary reality, where once Jewish settlements stood. The present emptiness is pointed out by Foer, as well, and is contrasted with the idealized fairy-tale past. The tension between these two descriptions of what might have been Trachimbrod and what has become of it are both starting points from two different sides of time for the negotiation of what it was *during* the Holocaust. The protagonists start their search from the reality of the present empty fields, but with an idealized image of the past in mind, in the form of an idyllic shtetl, at least in the case of the American Jonathan.

The symbolic ghost characters of *Everything is Illuminated* are Alex' grandfather, who accompanies Alex and Jonathan on their search journey, and Lista, an old woman they find instead of Augustine, the woman they had set out looking for. At the start of the journey, the search for Augustine reveals that almost all Jewish traces in the area of Ukraine the protagonists are searching have been erased. Although Jonathan has the exact coordinates of the former village Trachimbrod the searchers cannot find it. An old woman is finally found by the search party. People they ask for directions on the way claim no knowledge of the town ever existing (Foer *Everything* 114/115). They all seem to have silently conspired to not let any knowledge of past events about Trachimbrod's history to be passed on. Thereby, they are not only blocking knowledge from being gained by visitors or strangers, but also from being passed on to the next generation of Ukrainians. The reasons for this are most likely guilt and shame.

Lista's house is the only one still standing in an otherwise open field. It has taken the searchers several days to reach this remote place. Even she negates Alex's questions about Trachimbrod thirteen times before she finally acknowledges that she knows of it. Interestingly enough, the key in Alex' final question is the changed use of the word 'witness,' a change of perspective: He shows her the photograph of Augustine Jonathan has brought on the journey and after asking several times "Have you ever witnessed anyone in the photograph," he turns the question around, "Has anyone in this photograph ever witnessed you?" (Foer *Everything* 117/118) which finally reveals the truth. There was a village, named Trachimbrod, mainly inhabited by Jews, and Lista was one of its citizens:

Another tear descended.

[Lista:] "I have been waiting for you for so long."

I [Alex] pointed to the car. "We are searching for Trachimbrod."

"Oh," she said, and she released a river of tears. "You are here.

I am it." (Foer *Everything* 118)

Lista is, apparently, the only remaining citizen of Trachimbrod. She has kept all that is left of the villagers' belongings in her house. That is why she is referring to herself as "it", meaning the village. She has come to see herself as a symbol of, or a monument to, all the dead. However, she has not actively reached out to pass the memory on to anyone. She has passively waited to 'be found'. Reading her as a symbol, it becomes apparent that the obligation to *pass on* Holocaust memory cannot be placed on the survivor-sufferer witnesses. Their 'task' is to be the bearer of memory, keeping it alive. The responsibility to 'discover' and carry on this memory lies with every new following generation. How these following generations deal with the memory can be variable and selective (cf. Williams). In Foer's *Everything is Illumi-*

nated, the first and second generations, exemplified in Grandfather and Alex's father, chose to suppress all knowledge of the Holocaust. Instead of being handed down the knowledge about it, the third generation, exemplified by the protagonists Alex and Jonathan, has to re-discover everything on their own. However, this active discovery, instead of merely being handed pre-formulated knowledge, leads to a deep understanding and empathy.

The following passage describes Lista's outer appearance and gives examples of the things she has kept. Before addressing her, Alex sees her sitting on the front steps of a white, dilapidated house (Foer *Everything* 116):

She was very aged and peeling the skin off of corn. Many clothes were lying across her yard. I [Alex] am certain that they were drying after a cleaning, but they were in abnormal arrangements, and they appeared like clothes of invisible [sic] dead bodies. I reasoned that there were many people in the white house, because there were men's clothes and women's clothes and clothes for children and even babies.[...] It must be expensive, I thought, to care for so many people as she did.

After approaching the woman, the search party finds that she is on her own. The garments are not addressed further. Upon description of the massacre committed there by the Nazis it becomes clear that Lista has indeed arranged them like the dead bodies they remind Alex of. The clothes represent the killed villagers, some of whom are Lista's immediate family. The atrocity of the massacre is stressed by the description of children's and even babies' clothing arranged as a monument of the dead. Alex continues to describe the old woman's appearance:

[...] I could see that she did not have any teeth. Her hairs were [sic] white, her skin had brown marks, and her eyes were blue. She was not so much of a woman, and what I signify here is that she was very fragile, and appeared as if she could be obliterated with one finger. (ibid.)

This description of her missing teeth, age spots on her skin, her white hair, and her frailty exemplify Lista's age. She is wearing white garments, which have, however, become dirty (ibid.). White as the color of innocence in Western culture and also death, e.g. in Indian culture, is used to symbolize that Lista is at the same time an innocent victim and a guardian, still mourning the dead after many years. The fact that the innocent white of her clothing has been sullied represents that she has witnessed the atrocities. The same can be said about her white house. It has become a storage space for memory of the murdered, innocent Jews of Trachimbrod. Her frailty resembles the state of the memory she bears: it is in danger of being lost, like its bearer, who, in age, is close to death.

The deduction that Lista is Augustine's sister can be made after she recounts the most painfully detailed description of the Trachimbrod massacre committed by the Nazis (Foer *Everything* 185-187). In a third person narrative, Lista describes how a pregnant woman, Augustine's sister she says, is shot in the belly during a Nazi raid on her village, losing the child but surviving and crawling to safety from the ensuing massacre. The woman, in Lista's description, later returns and gathers the villagers' belongings so they are not stolen by the non-Jewish population. This reveals that Lista herself is Augustine's sister, whom she is talking about, as she is the only survivor and the one who has kept all things. This is underlined by her leaving the conversation under the pretext of having to care for 'her baby' although she is obviously long beyond childbearing age (Foer *Everything* 193). In retelling her story as a third person narrative, Lista shows that she has dissociated herself from the events and from herself as a person, as the text already indicates when she identifies herself with the entire village of Trachimbrod ("I am it").

Dissociation is common in trauma-sufferers. "Dissociative symptoms [recounted at a 1993 symposium] were strongly associated with exposure to psychological trauma, whether it was combat exposure, childhood trauma, or other traumas," states psychiatrist Douglas Bremner (xiii). It is currently debated in psychiatry whether this happens as a defense mechanism in order to protect the self from the trauma or whether it is a psychopathological response to trauma only some people show (ibid.). For extensive research and empirical studies on dissociation and trauma cf. Bremner and Marmar. As a character trait of Lista, dissociation is aptly chosen to represent her traumatized state.

Lista is a hoarder. She has kept everything she possibly could from Trachimbrod and its Jewish citizens to commemorate the dead and pass their possessions and therefore proof of their existence on to someone. In one room of her house she stores clothes, shoes, and photographs of hundreds of people. In the second room she keeps labeled boxes containing objects. Some of them are labeled with the names of their object contents, like "PRIVATE: JOURNALS / DIARIES / SKETCHBOOKS / UNDERWEAR," or "FIGURINES / SPECTACLES," while others are labeled in abstract terms, indicating violence and death, for example "DARKNESS" and "DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN," "DUST" (Foer *Everything* 147), or "WATER INTO BLOOD" (Foer *Everything* 150). Some boxes contain specifically Jewish items, such as "MENORAHS / INK / KEYS" (Foer *Everything* 149) and "STOCKINGS / KIDDUSH CUPS" (Foer *Everything* 150).

As some of these stored objects represent the outer, visible person, like clothing, others are representative of the inner person, the emotional, like the private experiences stored in the diaries. Lista has not chosen between what to keep and what to discard or leave to be forgotten. She has kept ev-

everything. This is representative of the state of trauma which does not allow for selective remembering. It is also indicative of the power struggle aspect of memory: Any kind of choice would eliminate certain memory possibilities in the event of such as massive human and cultural catastrophe as the Holocaust. The question of who is to say what is to be kept and what is to be discarded is 'answered' by the fictitious victim-survivor Lista in this novel: Although her motive is a compulsive trauma-induced act, it nevertheless serves the purpose of stating that a choice simply cannot be made. Anything may turn out to be of importance. As the Nazis tried to be as complete as possible in the destruction of the Jews in Europe, as completely must anything be preserved that serves their commemoration.

Aleida Assmann, in discussing "places of memory" as "spatial concretization of memory,"<sup>29</sup> names "memory boxes" as "objects in which important documents are preserved" (*Cultural Memory* 101). As examples, she mentions medieval "treasure chests" for the storage of important parchments and biblical memory boxes like Noah's Ark<sup>30</sup> as a "safe refuge" and "a microcosm of the world," and the Ark of the Covenant, "the chest containing the commandments that God had given to Moses" (ibid.). "Such portable containers," says Assmann, "may be seen as images for the contraction of cultural memory" (*Cultural Memory* 102). The German original of the sentence is formulated slightly differently, (the English translation possibly trying to avoid the term 'selection'), pointing toward the choice of memory documents as a central issue: "Die Darstellung solcher Gedächtnis-Container soll Aufschluss geben über das zentrale Problem der Auswahl im kulturellen Gedächtnis" (Assmann *Erinnerungsräume* 115). In Foer's text, the only possible way to avoid choice is practised—Lista has kept *everything* she could find to commemorate Trachimbrod and its people.

Lista hands one of her memory boxes, labeled "IN CASE" on to Jonathan (Foer *Everything* 192). Although it is only one of many, it is the beginning of the handing over of memory from one generation to a following one. The *second* generation, interestingly, is skipped. This is a recurring motif in Jewish American fiction and non-fiction from different generations. One possible explanation is that the survivor generation was too traumatized to discuss the Holocaust with their children, another is the will of the first generation to 'quietly' assimilate into the existing American society. This is addressed, to name one example, in Art Spiegelman's graphic novels *Maus I+II*.

29 In part I on functions of memory, chapter 5 "Memory Boxes". German terms used (Assmann *Erinnerungsräume*): "Gedächtniskisten" (114); and "Gedächtnis-Container" (115).

30 Assmann draws attention to the etymology of the word ark, the Latin *arca* meaning box or chest.

Gross and Rohr list German survivor Ruth Kluger (Gross/Rohr 30)<sup>31</sup> and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra (Gross/Rohr 31)<sup>32</sup>, among others, as proponents of this thesis of silence, stating that “[t]he repression thesis has received broad critical support, although the evidence is less than conclusive [...]” (Gross/Rohr 30). Hasia R. Diner, after extensive research, calls the repression thesis a “myth”, proposing there is ample “material that demonstrated a widespread and intense American Jewish engagement with the Holocaust in precisely the years when silence supposedly reigned, [...]” (ix). She had “long been bothered by the often repeated ‘truth’ about post-World War II American Jewry’s Holocaust avoidance, an assertion that to this day runs through the literature on American Jewish history” (ibid.). Individual experience and representation apparently differs greatly with regard to this aspect among Jewish Americans. In Foer’s novel *Everything is Illuminated*, the second generation father of Alex is smothered with love by the eye-witness grandfather, to no avail. He becomes a violent family tyrant. Grandfather, by trying to protect the next generation, has chosen to suppress his Holocaust knowledge. That this decision is the cause of his son’s violence and that the aspect of postmemory (cf. Hirsch) plays a role in this representation is a plausible interpretation.

Jonathan assumes the reason for Jewish citizens to hide personal belongings that Lista has found from the Nazis was motivated thus: “So there would be proof that she [a woman from Trachimbrod who buried her wedding ring] existed, [...] Evidence. Documentation. Testimony” (Foer *Everything* 192). Lista argues that without someone to talk about the ring it is worthless as ‘evidence’, and furthermore that the ring does not exist to be found but that the searchers exist to find the ring (ibid.). The importance of actively inquiring into the past in order to be able to commemorate important events and individual people is stressed in this symbolic discussion. The ‘finding’ is necessary for the personal identity of the searchers. It becomes evident that their search is not only about nostalgia, but, as soon as they realize the true dimension of the catastrophe, about ‘truth’ and knowledge. The things that Lista has kept are the true monument for Trachimbrod. When the search party goes to visit a commemorative stone with an inscription it is not described in nearly as touching a language as the boxes kept by Lista, filled with personal belongings. The (fictitious) monument, although necessary as a marker and for historic reasons, cannot create the empathy that *persons*, personal *objects* and their *stories* can. Its text merely states facts, and says nothing about the victims as individuals: “THIS MONUMENT STANDS IN MEMORY of the 1,204 TRACHIMBRODERS KILLED AT THE HANDS OF GERMAN FASCISM ON MARCH 18, 1942.

31 Footnote 5: Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (177).

32 Footnote 7: Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (158).

*Dedicated on March 18, 1992. Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister of the State of Israel*"<sup>33</sup> (Foer *Everything* 189, his capitals and italics). It is a public acknowledgement of events and important as such, yet a monument cannot be the only form of commemoration. If it were, the entire human, individual component of memory would be lost.

After visiting Lista, the searchers discuss their role in keeping the box labeled "In Case". They are unsure whether to open it or not. Examining random items from it, eventually, Grandfather discovers a photograph of himself and a friend in the memory box Lista has given Jonathan. The fact that he has had private discussions with Lista is now clarified in the storyline: Grandfather was a citizen of Trachimbrod, and present at the massacre. Lista recognized him immediately. Like her, he is an eye-witness. After encountering Lista, he finally talks about haunting memories from his past, for example as 'having ghosts' (Foer *Everything* 246) and appears like a ghost from the past himself. In the chapter called "Illumination", as a reference to the novel's title (Foer *Everything* 243-252), it is revealed that his name used to be Eli, that his best friend was Herschel, a Jew, and that he was responsible for Herschel's death by saving his own family. Grandfather's 'ghosts from the past' are the dead he could not help but betray and watch being betrayed to the Nazis in order to save his own family: "(Of course I have ghosts. [...] They are on the inside of my eyes.)" (Foer *Everything* 245). The parentheses around his statement visualize his closed eyelids.

Grandfather, who is the driver of the search party, argues, rather absurdly, that he is blind and that he has needed a seeing-eye dog ever since his wife died. This 'chosen' or imaginary blindness is a manifestation of his suppression of his traumatic Holocaust experience. The guilt Grandfather has lived with all the years has led to silence. Grandfather has never spoken of the past. During the trip, hints are given as to his involvement in the events surrounding Trachimbrod, but they are lost on the American protagonist, as all conversation must be translated for him, and Alex leaves things out, sometimes due to not understanding them, sometimes because they make him insecure. When Grandfather finally breaks this silence, after not having been able to find words for his experiences, the words start to flow without punctuation, eventually even blending into each other. The acute sense of his trauma experience re-surfacing is represented in this narrative style, covering several pages:

Herschel I [Grandfather] thought Herschel must escape how can he escape he must run into the darkness perhaps he has already run perhaps he heard the tanks and ran but when we arrived at the synagogue I saw Herschel and he

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33 As referenced earlier, for information on the real town of Trochenbrod, and the monument set up there, see Bendavid-Val.

saw me and we stood next to each other because that is what friends do in the presence of evil or love [sic!]. (Foer *Everything* 248)

In a stream of consciousness mode, Grandfather tells the most horrific aspects of his betrayal of Hershel and of Hershel's murder, triggered by the photograph. His words become difficult to follow. They stream out in an unstoppable manner as passive memory or *mémoire involontaire* (cf. Proust in Assmann *Introduction*):

[...] the next man in line and that was me [Grandfather] who is a Jew he [a Nazi general] asked and I felt Herschel's hand again and I know that his hand was saying pleaseplease Eli please I do not want to die please do not point at me you know what is going to happen to me if you point at me do not point at me I am afraid of dying I am so afraid of dying I am soafraidofdying Iamsoafraidofdying who is a Jew the General asked me again [sic!] [...]. (Foer *Everything* 250)

In order to save his own family, Grandfather points out Herschel as a Jew, who is then burned to death in the synagogue with the other Jews of the town. Jonathan is present during this revelation, yet needs Alex to translate. Alex, who starts out narrating grandfather's words to Jonathan verbatim, eventually adapts Grandfather's mode of talking in the situation of extreme stress, also joining words and phrases. The effect is one of panic. Struck by the horror of Grandfather's revelation Alex is not able to decide what to do with the knowledge he has just gained:

[...] Jonathan where do we go now what do we do with what we know Grandfather said that I am I but this could not be true the truth is that I also pointedatHerschel and I also said heisaJew [...] he is stillguilty I am I am Iam IamI? [sic!] (Foer *Everything* 252)

Alex knows Grandfather betrayed Herschel to save his wife and children and he is of the opinion that, despite the betrayal of a friend being wrong, he would have acted in the same way. He feels as guilty as if he himself had actually betrayed a friend. The entire process of Grandfather's revelation of his past is triggered by opening Lista's memory box. This opening has let bad memories 'back into the world', mirroring the myth of the box of Pandora. However, the difference to Pandora's Box of evil is the fact that the suppressed memory in Lista's memory box leads to 'illumination' and catharsis, even though the process of the revelation is difficult and painful for all characters involved.

Grandfather and Lista, whose legacies as witnesses are passed on to Alex and Jonathan, are ghosts from the past. In the case of Lista this becomes



clear when, after spending an entire day with the search party, Lista finally, after holding back for a long time, asks: "Is the war over?" (Foer *Everything* 193). She is referring to World War II which has been over for more than half a century, revealing she has been living in a trauma-state of timelessness (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*). While Lista has dissociated herself from the traumatic happenings she experienced, Grandfather has chosen to suppress them altogether and, also by dissociation, has 'become' a different person with a different name. After the cathartic experience of revealing his guilt to his grandson, Grandfather commits suicide, not out of desperation, but because he is at rest, finally, as he states in his suicide note. There is no reason for him to keep on living in an utterly changed world.

Lista has earlier declined the offer of being taken to 'civilization' and being cared for by Grandfather. "There is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism," writes Walter Benjamin in the chapter "On the Concept of History"<sup>34</sup> in his work *Illuminations*, the title of which resounds in Foer's novel's title. Benjamin's choice of suicide on the brink of rescue rather than risking falling into the Nazis' hands strongly underlines his dictum. Choosing to continue a life in solitude, as a hermit, bespeaks of the negative experiences Lista has had with humanity and its 'civilization'. The question of how a 'civilized' country like Germany, and other parts of Europe, with their cultural achievements were able to fall back into total barbarism during the Nazi-reign is a question that is indirectly addressed in this passage. The question remains unanswered. In this specific situation, civilization is rejected as a 'cure' for the traumatic situation Lista is in. Lista thus remains behind in her house full of memories. She has finally been able to tell her story and even make peace with an (involuntary) 'collaborator', Grandfather. She must remain as a living monument, in her house, with the things she collected and saved from being forgotten. Her task of being a witness is not over; more people might come to find her.

Alex is as important as Jonathan in passing on memory. He is the one to receive knowledge of Lista's story in his native language, Ukrainian, partly from her, partly from Grandfather. He is the one translating the recounts to English and thereby passing on important details to Jonathan. Thus, the Holocaust is not represented as an Americanized event in this novel. The memory place at which the important events of the novel take place is an original place in Ukraine. The Holocaust and its consequences are represented as something that must be equally *worked through*, that is, come to terms with or processed, by the descendants of the victims, now living in all parts of the world, many in the U.S.. The descendants of the local popula-

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34 Original: "Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein." In: "Über den Begriff der Geschichte VII", in *Illuminationen* (254).

tion, of whom many have at least partly, if involuntarily, collaborated in the crimes, must equally work through this collective trauma.

The continuance of the transmission process, for example Alex' and Jonathan's respective ways of dealing with their experiences, is left open. Because of Alex commenting on this in his letters to Jonathan, it becomes known to the readers that Jonathan is about to publish a book about the journey. What kind of book this will be in particular is left open. It includes a fictitious history of the shtetl Trachimbrod, and Alex frequently comments on aspects he would like Jonathan to change, indicating a struggle of memories, as Alex urges Jonathan to leave out particularly painful aspects of the story, such as him recalling Grandfather crying (Foer *Everything* 5).

The dialogue and friendship between Alex and Jonathan is one of the most important aspects of the novel with regard to the future. The beginning of the novel shows anti-Semitic resentments in the local population in Ukraine, for example, and this friendship is the beginning of overcoming such resentments. The title, *Everything is Illuminated*, refers to the memory they have uncovered together. The 'truth' about Trachimbrod and about Grandfather's and Lista's experiences has been revealed and is going to be placed in the spotlight by Jonathan's book. On the one hand, the title rings of the constant malapropisms employed by Alex. 'Illumination', however, can refer to colorful illustrations, such as William Blake's *Illuminated Books*. Used in that sense, the term clarifies that history has been filled with authentic personal stories, that personal lives are highlighted by the novel. Intertextual references to Walter Benjamin's philosophical approaches to history in *Illuminations* are invoked as well as to Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, in which the narrator, after finding images reminding him of his childhood in a book on Hitler, states: "In the sunset of dissolution everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine" (4). The term nostalgia seems to be irreconcilable with the Holocaust. As the title suggests a festive mode of remembrance, however, it can serve to commemorate Holocaust witnesses in a dignified way, not 'merely' as victims but as bearers of important knowledge and memory to humankind.

The fact that Lista is a very old woman in the novel brings to the foreground the issue of the dying out of the eye-witness generation. It asks the question of what will happen to the eye-witnesses' knowledge, represented in this novel by the things Lista has collected and stored. In terms of the novel, at least, the knowledge of the existence of the things is not lost, although the ending is quite unsatisfactory with regard to a 'proper' process of passing on memory. Too much is left to chance for a subject as important as the one of Holocaust remembrance. The text does not give answers to the important question of passing on Holocaust memory, only suggestions and impulses. It does stress personal responsibility in the current generation to

search for, find, and interview eye-witnesses as long as they exist, in order to receive their memory and also further personal growth in a conscious, educated, and empathetic cosmopolitan society.

### 3.1.2 Ghosts in Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, set in post 9/11 New York City, contains three figures resembling *ghosts from the past*: The child protagonist Oskar Schell, his grandfather Thomas Schell Sr., and his grandmother whose name is undisclosed. These three characters are symbolic of different traumata and examples of different ways of coping with trauma.

The Holocaust and Judaism are not mentioned in this novel. Its main themes are the traumata of the Dresden firebombing during WW II and of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City on September 11, 2001. However, as *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*'s characters bear resemblances to the symbolic characters examined in Foer's first novel, as well as to Auslander's, and Krauss', it is interesting to analyze it in this context. Resemblance to characters and topics in Krauss' *The History of Love* are particularly striking: A first generation father who loses his second generation son and meets up with a third generation child. A third generation child's loss of his father due to a catastrophe is a main aspect of both novels. Both novels were published in the same year and text comparisons of the authors Foer and Krauss, a then married couple, reveals shared ideas. Their works, analyzed individually, serve as examples of the symbolic characters prevalent in third generation Jewish American writing identified earlier.

It is necessary to note that every trauma is different, every survivor-sufferer deals with traumata differently, and a trauma can have extremely varied causes. Despite this extreme variation, as between war experiences or terrorist attacks, the fundamental definition of a trauma is the same in every case, as discussed in chapter 2.2. Therefore, the traumata of Holocaust experience in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* and of the WW II bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima, and finally the 9/11 attacks in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are not discussed as different kinds of traumata with regard to their cause. Their outcome is the same: survivor-sufferers who show clear symptoms of traumatic memory and trauma-symptoms (cf. Duggan).

Oskar Schell, 9-year-old boy, is the protagonist of the novel and the person who moves the plot forward. He is traumatized by the loss of his father in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City in 2001. His grandmother is someone he greatly trusts and confides in. His grandfather, Thomas Schell Sr., is a character who the reader cannot be sure truly exists at the beginning of the novel. Oskar's grandmother has a mysterious "renter"

in her apartment, whom, for the longest time, Oskar's mother thinks of as an imaginary friend. He is never seen by anybody but grandmother. Only toward the end of the novel does this renter, the grandfather, make an actual appearance and reveals himself to his grandson Oskar. So as not to be confused with the grandfather in Foer's first novel discussed previously, this character is referred to by his name, Thomas Schell Sr. or as 'the renter'.

Uytterschout and Versluys find different ways of dealing with trauma in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and discuss them extensively in their essay "Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*". Referring to LaCapra's use of "the Freudian terms 'acting out' or *melancholia* and 'working through' or mourning in the field of trauma studies (LaCapra 1994, 2001)," (216), they show how grandmother and the renter, respectively, are symbolic characters of two different ways of dealing with trauma. They are repression on Thomas Schell Sr.'s side and trying to actively remember and cope on grandmother's side. In Oskar, Uytterschout and Versluys see "[a]spects of both acting out and working through [are] in turn synthesized," as "the boy displays characteristics of both the melancholic and a mourner" (ibid.). All three are survivor-sufferers in the sense of Duggan. They all display trauma-symptomatic aspects of survivor guilt and low self-esteem, among others.

The renter, Thomas Schell Sr., is a traumatized WW II survivor who has gradually lost his ability to speak as a consequence of the horrors he experienced in the war, more explicitly, in the Dresden bombing, in which his pregnant girlfriend Anna died. He marries Oskar's grandmother, his girlfriend's sister, years later. The text does not present this as a love marriage, but as a union out of pity and also the necessity to be with someone who understands his trauma. His former girlfriend Anna's sister resembles Anna and reminds him of her. He leaves her when she becomes pregnant against their agreement not to have children and comes back to her forty years later. This is why his own son, daughter in law, and his grandson do not know him. He has written letters explaining himself to his unborn son (e.g. Foer *Extremely Loud* 16), but never sent them.

Besides not speaking, Thomas Schell Sr.'s way of interacting and communicating with others, especially his wife, takes on extreme forms. It is clear to both him and her that he sees his dead fiancée in her and does not love her for her own sake. He has the words "yes" and "no" tattooed on his palms (Foer *Extremely Loud* 17), which is represented by photographs in the novel (Foer *Extremely Loud* 260/261). These and other photographs are only one aspect of the different visual aids Foer's text employs. It is notable that photographs play an important role in second generation Holocaust remembrance,

as Hirsch points out in her essay on postmemory<sup>35</sup>. This stylistic device is used here without reference to the Holocaust, but as a reference to other WW II trauma and also to 9/11 trauma. For example, in the last, unnumbered, pages of the novel, 15 photo illustrations of a human jumping/falling from a building are presented as a reverse flip-book. Images are used in many incidents in the novel because there are no words to describe the traumatic events authentically. Thomas Schell Sr. prefers to use prewritten sentences instead of writing accurate answers to questions, for example. He does make an effort to be with his wife again after he returns, yet their interaction is disturbing. For example, they make love without looking at each other, denying this act the closeness it usually implies in a married couple. The apartment they inhabit, but in which Thomas Schell Sr. is hiding from the outside world, contains "Nothing Places" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 110), in which each must be left alone by the other. Like the love-making, this puts a distance into their relationship that is unusual for (married) partners sharing their lives.

In one room, Thomas Schell Sr. writes all over the walls, things like "I wanted so much to have a life," and "Even just once, even for a second" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 238). The words he cannot voice find their way not onto paper, but onto the walls of his room, where he sees them constantly. His trauma goes so deep that he is caught forever in the past, not able to appreciate anything or anyone about his present life. While some trauma survivor-sufferers are able to establish a new life and have moments when they are not thinking about their trauma, this seems to be impossible for him.

Instead of interacting with humans or hoarding things, the renter, Thomas Schell Sr., hoards animals. Grandmother describes his living circumstances when he was living alone thus:

His apartment was like a zoo. There were animals everywhere. Dogs and cats. A dozen bird cages. Fish tanks. Glass boxes with snakes and lizards and insects. Mice in cages, so the cats wouldn't get them. Like Noah's ark [spaces sic!] (Foer *Extremely Loud* 82).

It is notable that she hits the space bar or tab button more often than necessary after every word in her letters, as if leaving a gap for things unsaid. This kind of space or gap is referred to in the course of this chapter with regard to trauma representation. The direct reference to Noah's Ark is reminiscent of the memory boxes named by Aleida Assmann, in reference to Lista's boxes

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35 The aspect of visualizations in Holocaust literature, especially photographs, is not pursued in this work. For exhaustive treatment of the topic see various works on photography and Holocaust memory, e.g. publications by Hirsch herself, Susan Sontag, Ernst van Alphen, and others in Hirsch's bibliography (126/127).

full of items. The renter's animals do not so much serve the purpose of being saved for a future life, but are rather living companions without verbal demands. They serve his need for closeness to living beings without him having to use words to communicate. He can touch and feed them but he does not have to talk to them and he is in control of all interaction taking place.

The renter lives a secluded life and has chosen to remain 'hidden'. Not only can he not communicate through the spoken word anymore, he avoids contact to people in general. His reaching out to his grandson, a member of generation three, can be seen as representative of survivors who were not able to discuss their traumata with the second generation. He makes it a point in his marriage not to have children because he is aware of his inability to discuss, or process his trauma. When his wife becomes pregnant, in his logic, he has to leave, as he cannot even begin to try to cope. What brings the renter back is his son's death in the World Trade Center attacks. While he was not able to be close to his family before, through their living through a trauma of their own, he has found the way to come back into their lives. The family, not only him and his wife but also his daughter-in-law and his grandson, now share a traumatic experience.

Grandmother leads a life connected to her family and has a very close relationship with her grandson. However, she does not discuss her previous life with him. She does write him a letter about how she grew up, trying then to explain her marriage to his grandfather Thomas Schell Sr. (Foer *Extremely Loud* 75-85). Her entire experience during WW II is left out in her letter and her story recommences when she re-meets Thomas, her sister's fiancé, in New York seven years later. About the 'missing' period of time, she writes: "The seven years were not seven years. They were not seven hundred years. Their length could not be measured in years, just as an ocean could not explain the distance we had traveled, just as the dead can never be counted" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 81). This time period covers her traumatic war experiences, the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945 and the death of her family, and the following struggle for survival, until she reaches the New World. Although outwardly seeming to cope better with her traumata than Thomas Schell Sr., she is suicidal, as Uytterschout and Versluis stress (234).

Thomas Schell Sr.'s inability to process his trauma clashes with her trying to 'work through' it. He will not even admit to being the person she knows, as she writes to her grandson: "Are you Thomas? I [grandmother] asked. He shook his head no. You are, I said. I know you are. He shook his head no. [...] [But] he did not admit to being who he was. He never did" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 81). They establish a relationship and marriage, nevertheless, and he then leaves her when she becomes pregnant. Uytterschout and Versluis explain how "Thomas's abandonment of wife and child is part of

LaCapra's definition of 'acting out'. Trauma victims suffering from melancholia may be profoundly unable to act responsibly and/or ethically, for example by giving consideration to other people (LaCapra 2001, 28)" (234, footnote 3).

Grandmother says she has "crummy eyes" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 81) and later claims near blindness. It is obvious from her daily activities that she can see alright, and that this 'blindness' is something she invents, like the grandfather in Foer's first novel, connected to her trauma. As described earlier, in her letters to Oskar she hits the space or the tabs bar more often than necessary. There are blanks in the narrative of her life, for which she cannot find words and which she represents by leaving spaces. Foer foreshadows his next work, *Tree of Codes*<sup>36</sup> in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, when he leaves out words or has grandmother purposely 'type' her life story on a typewriter without ink, only ever repeatedly hitting the space bar because, she says, "[m]y life story was spaces" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 176). Also, the "Nothing Places" mentioned earlier are a reference to loss and inability to communicate, and are symbolic of trauma. These spaces and nothing places are strongly reminiscent of art projects like Christian Boltanski's artwork as described in Aleida Assmann (*Cultural Memory* 361-365). Boltanski, whose "Jewish father survived by hiding" (Assmann *Cultural Memory* 361), in installations and similar art, focuses on "the tracing of loss – the loss of objects, [...] the loss of memories, [...] the loss of bodies [...]" (ibid.). One of the projects commemorating loss is the *Missing House* in 1990 Berlin:

On a World War II bomb site in the eastern part [of Berlin], Boltanski "built" his missing house by putting plaques on the security wall of the two adjacent buildings. Thanks to diligent research in the archives, [...] he was able to find the names of the former occupants, their professions, and some of their personal histories. On the level of each original floor, Boltanski put nameplates of the people and families who had lived in this house before and during the war. (Assmann *Cultural Memory* 364)

The installation is an example of representing loss similar to Foer's novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. There is no reference in particular to former Jewish inhabitants of the house in Boltanski's art. However, the artist being Jewish, and Berlin being the site of flourishing Jewish life before Nazism, it becomes clear to the educated spectator that as a commemoration of loss through war, particularly to a bomb that destroyed the house, this piece of art also commemorates other ways of people becoming 'lost',

36 *Tree of Codes* is a reminiscence of Polish writer Bruno Schulz's 1934 work *The Street of Crocodiles*. Words are literally physically cut out of the original text. It is discussed further in chapter 3.2 on symbolic ghost figures in Krauss' *The History of Love*.



e.g. through deportation. The same is true of Foer's novel. As a Jewish author, after having written a highly acclaimed Holocaust novel, *Everything is Illuminated*, Foer's representation of WW II traumata like the Dresden firebombing and the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* need no additional narrative finger pointing toward the Holocaust. As the major trauma of WW II it is ever present, whether addressed directly or not. The traumatized symbolic characters in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* share so many traits with their counterparts in Holocaust writing that this thesis is strongly underlined.

When Thomas Schell Sr. and Oskar Schell as representatives of generation one and three, both traumatized by the loss of their father, respectively, son, finally meet, this is a semi-cathartic moment for both. For the first time, the renter acknowledges and contacts his grandchild, and tries to communicate. Oskar is able to voice his trauma for the first time and both decide to dig up Thomas Schell Jr.'s coffin together: "A man stood there without saying anything, and it was obvious he wasn't a burglar. He was incredibly old and had a face like the opposite of Mom's, because it seemed like it was frowning even when it wasn't frowning. [...] Are you the renter?" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 237). Although, or, arguably, because he is a complete stranger, Oskar is able to confide in Thomas Schell Sr. the entire story of his trauma about his father's death. For the first time he plays a recording of his father's voice to someone else. This recording constitutes the most traumatic of Oskar's experiences. He listened to his father's last words on the answering machine without being able to pick up, while his father was trapped in one of the burning World Trade Center towers. The renter, upon hearing this, does not reveal his identity as Oskar's grandfather. He does, however, try to speak actual words to Oskar, but fails. He is able, at least, to assure Oskar of his support in the written form (Foer *Extremely Loud* 258). Knowing about Thomas Schell Sr.'s inability to process his own trauma and knowing he, like his wife, has been re-traumatized by the death of their son on 9/11 (cf. Uytterschout and Versluys 220), it is a near-miracle that he establishes contact to his grandchild and makes an effort to interact. The *shared* trauma of 9/11 creates enough empathy for this step. As both experienced this trauma, they do not need to exchange words about it in order to understand each other.

What haunts Oskar are recurring thoughts of how exactly his father died. These repetitive thoughts are very typical of trauma, which Oskar thinks he could overcome if only he knew the exact process of his father's death: "I [Oskar] said 'I need to know how he died.' [...] 'Why?' 'So I can stop inventing how he died. I am always inventing'" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 256). The uncertainty of what happened is a recurring, compulsive thought in Oskar Schell's traumatic memory, instead of having to constantly remember a spe-



cific kind of death. The effects, however, are the same. He compulsively searches the Internet for images of people jumping from buildings because that is one thing he imagines his father may have done. The ending of the novel, as mentioned earlier, is constituted by several illustrated photographs of a man jumping from a building, placed together in reverse, creating a flip-book of a man falling upward, to safety, representing the undoing of a death. This can be read as a positive outlook on Oskar coming to terms with his trauma. As he is very young and already on his way to actively dealing with his trauma instead of suppressing it, his outlook is a good one, clinically speaking. He and his grandfather search for and dig up Thomas Schell Jr.'s grave together, to ascertain what they know: his body is not in the coffin as no remains were found (Foer *Extremely Loud* 317-319). Yet, seeing the empty coffin, they confront themselves with the truth of his death. They then turn the empty coffin into a "memory box" in the sense of Aleida Assmann (*Cultural Memory* 101), which coffins, incidentally, are in any case. Oskar wants to fill it with things that used to belong to his father, as he does not need them anymore. Thomas Schell Sr. puts in all the unsent letters he has written to his son, explaining his inability to care for him and telling him that he loves him (Foer *Extremely Loud* 321).

Oskar Schell is an intertextual reminiscence of Oskar Matzerath in Günther Grass' *The Tin Drum*<sup>37</sup>. He bears strong symbolic characteristics: He speaks French, calls himself a pacifist, which for a nine year-old are unique accomplishments, wears only white clothing – a color that can symbolize purity, peace, but also death, and bears the name of an important literary predecessor. Grass' Oskar is an equally symbolic figure with regard to WW II and Fascism during that time. While *The Tin Drum*'s Oskar Matzerath claims to have been born mentally fully matured, Oskar Schell also appears wise beyond his age. Oskar Matzerath, however, is a highly unreliable narrator, as he tells his life's story as an adult and a patient in a mental hospital. Oskar Schell shares Oskar Matzerath's percussive hobby; he plays the tambourine and has "percussionist" listed on his calling card as one of his occupations, along with "vegan" and "pacifist" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 99). Like Oskar Matzerath he hopes he will not grow. Oskar Matzerath tells the reader that he decided not to grow any bigger as a protest against middle class mediocrity, and aids this decision by throwing himself down a flight of stairs, which results in a head injury. Oskar Schell tries to stunt his growth by drinking coffee because he thinks not growing will keep him from aging and therefore, from dying: "Coffee! 'It stunts my growth, and I'm afraid of death'" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 154). Another literary figure that comes to mind upon the idea of a boy not wanting to grow (up) is Peter Pan, as pointed out by Uytterschout and Versluys (228/229). However, Peter Pan's moti-

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37 Original German title: *Die Blechtrommel*.

vation lies in not wanting to lose the fun in his life as a child, a completely different one from Oskar Matzerath and Oskar Schell. Oskar Schell's first name and initials also bring to mind the historical figure of Oskar Schindler, who managed to save Jews in Germany from being sent to concentration camps by requiring them as laborers for his business. The historical and the fictional referential Oskars, therefore, serve as indirect references to Holocaust trauma.

All three symbolic ghost characters in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are obsessed with events in the past and bear an unreal quality about them: Oskar Schell is too unrealistic a character for a nine-year-old child, wise beyond his age. His white clothes in particular evoke associations of innocence and death. Thomas Schell Sr., the grandfather, is someone who, for a big part of the novel, readers cannot be sure exists. He could be an imaginary figure grandmother creates in order not to feel lonely, as Oskar's mother suspects. His muteness and hiding make his character additionally fleeting and ghost-like. Grandmother, giving off an outward appearance of coping with her trauma, is not dealing with it any better than Schell Sr., feigning near blindness, 'typing' only space when supposedly recounting her life-story, and planning to commit suicide by drowning herself in the Hudson River (Foer *Extremely Loud* 82). As symbolic characters, they represent universal suffering at the cause of violent conflict, therefore propagating a pacifist world view. These three ghosts are not representing Holocaust memory directly. However, they are linked to symbolic Holocaust characters through their experience of trauma and share many of their characteristics. Despite the similarities, Oskar, as a child, is a rather unusual symbolic ghost character. He represents a new generation and is certainly not a residual figure. As he shows clear signs of working through his trauma at a young age he represents hope for the generations of the new millennium in the aspect of coming to terms with their specific traumata.

In this novel, Foer touches upon trauma as the result the horrors of WW II, exemplified in the bombings of Dresden on February 13, 1945 and Hiroshima, August 6, 1945 and also the trauma of the terrorist attacks of New York on September 11, 2001. Foer is not *likening* the Holocaust to these other trauma events, but shows that the represented forms of trauma are similar to the ones of Holocaust survivors, and result in survivor guilt and inability to find words for what has happened, for example. As his first novel *Everything is Illuminated* deals extensively with the Holocaust in particular, Foer chooses a different, more American than Jewish, focus for his second work. As shown, the traumatized, ghost-like character symbol reverberates in this work as well.

It is notable that in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, it does not matter whether Americans are the cause (Dresden, Hiroshima) or the victims

(9/11) of trauma. The focus in Foer is on the suffering of the victims. Human suffering from violence, as Foer shows, is the same, no matter who causes it. Thomas Schell Sr.'s description of the firestorm in Dresden<sup>38</sup> (Foer *Extremely Loud* 210/211) is similar in word choice to the eye-witness account of the Hiroshima bombing by TOMOYASU<sup>39</sup> (Foer *Extremely Loud* 187 ff.), especially the detail of bodies 'melted' by the heat: "I saw humans melted into thick pools of liquid" (Dresden, 211), "I saw a young girl coming toward me. Her skin was melting down her. It was like wax" (Hiroshima, 187). Oskar Schell chooses the Hiroshima eye-witness account as a topic for a school presentation after 9/11, as he is haunted by the terrorist attacks' violence and what it did to people. Grandmother is "re-traumatized" (Uytterschout and Versluys 220) by the 9/11 attacks she sees on TV (while she is in the city of New York), as they remind her of her experiences in Dresden:

Smoke kept pouring from a hole in the building. Black smoke. I remember the worst storm of my childhood. From my window I saw the books pulled from my father's shelves. They flew. A tree that was older than any person tipped away from our house. [...] When the second plane hit, the woman who was giving the news started to scream. A ball of fire rolled out of the building and up. One million pieces of paper filled the sky. (Foer *Extremely Loud* 225)

She repeats the phrases "Bodies falling. Planes going into buildings. Buildings falling" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 231) over and over again. The severity of her flashback memory becomes apparent in her wish to die: "I wanted to lie in my own waste, which is what I deserved. I wanted to be a pig in my own filth. [...] Bodies falling. Buildings falling. The rings of the tree that fell away from our house. I wanted so much for it to be me under the rubble" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 231/232). The narrative of her account of the one event 'melts' into the other, without clear differentiation. This appears to be directly inspired by Edda West's eye-witness account:

On September 11, 2001, as I watched the horror of the World Trade Center attack and destruction, I started having flashbacks of where I had come from, what my family had lived through, and the deep cellular memory I still hold as a survivor of the Dresden firebombing in 1945. [...] My mind was screaming. This is Dresden!! This is Dresden again!! I am witnessing this over again - another time, another place, but the horror and destruction are the same, differing only in a lesser death toll, [...].

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38 Inspired by the following two sources, according to Uytterschout and Versluys (235): Metzger and West.

39 Apparently inspired by the eye-witness account of Kinue Tomoyasu, cf. Mossberg.

West clearly states that to the survivor-sufferer, time, place, and cause are not as relevant in the face of the horror of a traumatic experience itself, and that similar events can trigger re-traumatization (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*).

As massive wars like the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not occurring around the millennial change, trauma writing may be moving into the direction of terrorism-trauma representation rather than war-trauma representation. Especially for American authors, the 9/11 trauma is a relevant literary topic, as numerous publications show. Art Spiegelman as a second generation Jewish American graphic author living in New York, is reminded of his parents' Auschwitz trauma<sup>40</sup> by the event, as he states in the introductory chapter "The Sky is Falling!" of *In the Shadow of No Towers*:

Before 9/11 my traumas were all more or less self-inflicted, but outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center left me reeling on that faultline where World History and Personal History collide—the intersection my parents, Auschwitz survivors, had warned me about when they taught me to always keep my bags packed. It took a long time to put the burning towers behind me.

Like the previous quote, Spiegelman's statement makes clear how a certain trauma can trigger traumatic memory of another one, even if it is not first-hand memory, but, in Spiegelman's case postmemory, as Hirsch calls it.

While the official political answer of the United States of America under the George W. Bush government after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was a so-called "War on Terror", Foer's novel presents different horror scenarios all connected to war, in order to show that war, or revenge, can only lead to suffering. Foer prominently displays the *pacifist* protagonist Oskar, who is traumatized by the 9/11 attacks, by the loss of his own father. Although after the attack, Oskar feels scared in the presence of foreign people, he has enough common sense to not condemn an entire group of people or a specific faith for the attacks, or to plot revenge.

Despite the WW II trauma the first generation characters, grandmother and Thomas Schell Sr., are suffering from not being Holocaust trauma, the connection to other first generation members represented by third generation authors is clear: Third generation authors create first generation survivor characters who take on symbolical qualities. They have survived WW II and are represented as severely traumatized by it. In this novel by Foer, traumatization has led to loss of speech and inability to lead a normal life for Thomas Schell Sr.. Grandmother becomes a writer of her life, typing without ink, not able to commit what has happened to her on paper for the following generation(s). In their state of traumatization and inability to find or commit words, they resemble the symbolic ghost characters in Foer's first

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40 As semi-fictionalized in his graphic novels/memoirs *Maus I+II*.

novel. Oskar Schell, on the other hand, is a representative of generation three. His symbolic qualities, however, make him so un-life-like, as if he were Oskar Mazerath, re-appearing from the past, to warn yet another generation of the dangers of war.

### 3.1.3 Ghosts in Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy*

Two controversial examples of symbolic ghost characters are presented by third generation Jewish American writer Shalom Auslander in *Hope: A Tragedy*. One is the protagonist's mother, an elderly woman who has no direct Holocaust experience, but pretends she does. The other is a fictitious, aged survivor-Anne Frank.

Auslander's Jewish American protagonist, Solomon Kugel, "approaching 40", (Auslander *Hope* 7) moves away from New York City, into a home in rural Stockton with his wife, son, and mother. The latter presents herself as a concentration camp survivor, which she is not. She started pretending after her husband left them, when Solomon was six years old (Auslander *Hope* 62/63). Finding out that dropping hints about a Holocaust past silences and appeases her demanding landlord and generates compassion, she uses this power over anyone near her, especially her son Solomon. She ties him close to her in teaching him to hate his father, to fear the Holocaust, and to pity her. This takes on extreme forms, like her showing him random Holocaust photographs she has collected from newspapers, telling him his relatives are in the pictures. When she presents him with a lamp shade, telling him it 'is' his grandfather, an historical allusion to a lamp shade Nazi Ilse Koch supposedly had made of human skin in the concentration camp of Buchenwald, young Solomon becomes critical for a moment: "It says Made in Taiwan, Kugel said" (Auslander *Hope* 65). "Well they're not going to write Made in Buchenwald, are they?" (ibid.) his mother retorts. He suspects his mother of wanting to make him afraid of other people:

If the intended effect of the gifting of the lamp shade was to make Kugel fearful of people, it had, in actuality, something of an opposite result; he came to fear inanimate objects. If the lamp shade could be his grandfather, was the sofa his cousin? Was the ottoman his aunt? [...] perhaps the toilet was his uncle, [...]. (ibid.)

This absurd episode has a comic undertone, yet its resulting in laughter of comic relief is doubtful, as the background of the joke is grotesque.

Mother keeps things stored away in boxes in the attic, about which Kugel says: "Mother was a hoarder. She kept everything. Ever since the war, she said with a sigh as she packed for the move to Kugel's new home, putting yet

another torn, fading scrap of paper into yet another straining overfilled box" (Auslander *Hope* 20). In this and other behavior, Kugel's mother shows signs of a traumatized Holocaust survivor, similar to the *symbolic ghost characters* presented in this chapter so far. In her case, the Holocaust forms an 'adopted' trauma that she willingly submits to, carefully acting out all signs she connects with the behavior of 'real' survivors.

When on a school trip to a Holocaust museum in 6th grade young Solomon thinks he recognizes his mother in one of the exhibited photographs, his teacher clarifies the facts for him: "Your mother is my age, Solomon, said Mrs. Rosengarten. She wasn't even born when the photo was taken. And she was born in Brooklyn" (Auslander *Hope* 67). After his grandmother confirms his findings, yet tries to pass *herself* off as a Holocaust survivor, Kugel does more research: "It didn't take Kugel much digging to discover that Grandmother hadn't been in the war, either. The Kugels were fifth-generation Americans; none of them had been in the war" (Auslander *Hope* 68).

From then on, Kugel indulges his mother's strange habit, because "[s]he seemed to need the war, and he was pleased to be able to give it to her" (Auslander *Hope* 69). This 'needing the war' is what makes Kugel's mother a controversial symbolic ghost character. In his essay "The Holocaust's Life as a Ghost"<sup>41</sup>, Zygmunt Bauman refers to the Holocaust itself as a ghost, stressing its 'haunting' qualities in the present, that is the horror it generates even among those who were not victims themselves. Bauman sees two dangers in Holocaust memory: One is what French intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, in *The Imaginary Jew*<sup>42</sup>, refers to as Jews who, without having suffered from the Holocaust themselves are "living on a borrowed identity – as martyrs by appointment, martyrs who never suffered [...]" (Baumann paraphrasing Finkielkraut 3). Such is the character of Kugel's mother, victimizing herself she also victimizes her son, who, if he were not to die at the end of the novel, would make a "hereditary victim" (Bauman 5) of his own son in turn. This suggests a collective suffering of an entire people without any chance of 'escape'. Another danger, according to Bauman, quoting Anne Karpf (3), is a "competition for victimhood," a "pecking order of pain," as to who suffered the most. This is represented in Auslander's novel in a dialogue of Kugel with random strangers. When he asks on a whim whether a couple would hide him and his family in their attic "if something happened," (Auslander *Hope* 95) the woman feels insulted because "[I] lost relatives in the Holocaust, she said. So? asked Kugel. So I find that offensive" (Auslander *Hope* 95/96). The ensuing conversation revolves around who lost more family members in the Holocaust, neither opponent being

41 An essay published also, in a slightly different version, in *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Law, Politics and Education* (DeCoste/Schwartz).

42 Original French title: *Le Juif Imaginaire*.

specific: “How many did you lose? [...] More than you” (ibid.). This exchange constitutes a struggle within the struggle of memory, as it no longer only asks the question of which memory event is to be remembered, but whose memory of the event is the one ‘more valid’.

Like Solomon Kugel himself, who constantly thinks about how he will die and what his last words will be, his mother is preoccupied with death. However, she suspects a Holocaust-like event to be the cause, whereas Kugel sees his inevitable death in almost anything accidental, from an illness like cancer to an accident in a car, but not by murder:

Kugel was determined not to die at the hands of another, if only to disprove his mother, who insisted that her last words, and her son’s last words, and her son’s son’s last words, whatever they might be, would be said in a gas chamber. Or in an oven. Or at the bottom of a mass grave. Or at the top of a mass grave. (Auslander 2012:7/8)

The reference to a “gas chamber” is enough to avoid any misunderstanding about what she means, the text names two more key words linked to the Holocaust, “oven” and “mass grave”, to make clear that Kugel’s mother affects to be expecting another Holocaust, in the USA.

Kugel’s mother’s influence over him is very strong. She makes his life constantly revolve around the Holocaust and a possible future Holocaust. Her influence *haunts* Kugel, to the extent that an analysis of his behavior is necessary to understand her symbolic power as ‘ghost’: Watching a 4th of July parade Kugel touches upon a core aspect of the novel, his increasing alienation, due to his mother’s ‘Holocaust indoctrination’:

July Fourth had always been one of Kugel’s favorite holidays; it had never failed to stir within him, even when he was a child, a feeling beyond patriotism—a feeling rather of belonging, of oneness with a nation of strangers. (Auslander *Hope* 222)

Calling his fellow Americans ‘strangers’ whom he only under rare circumstances feels connected to, Kugel defines himself as the ‘other’, the outsider, because of his being Jewish. However, Kugel seems not only alienated by and from non-Jewish Americans. He rather feels alienated by and from humans in general. The question about lessons learned from recurring human atrocities is asked frequently by him and by the novel. Thoughts of patriotism upon seeing said parade drift automatically to thoughts about 9/11 and the words “Never Forget” (ibid.). “Why not? wondered Kugel. Why not forget? Isn’t that what they would have wanted, the terrorists, that we never forget? That’s probably how they came up with the whole plan: Holy shit,

said one, they are NEVER going to forget this" (ibid.). This thought leads Kugel to the question of what is to be learned from history:

Where there lessons to be learned? What, then? Did we know anything the day after, some kernel of wisdom or truth or knowledge that we hadn't known the day before? That life is short? [...] That men killed and are killed in return? What? Nothing. (ibid.)

His conclusion that nothing is to be learned shows a defeatist view of the world. In this interior monologue, Kugel questions the necessity of remembrance, coming to the conclusion that it is harmful, even. He refers specifically to the Balkan War of the 1990s:

What's the harm in forgetting? What does remembering do? Kugel had read that the war in the Balkans was referred to as the War of the Grandmothers; that after fifty years of peace, it was the grandmothers who reminded their offspring to hate each other, the grandmothers who reminded them of past atrocities, of indignities long gone. Never forget! shouted the grandmothers. So their grandchildren remembered, and their grandchildren died [...]. (Auslander *Hope* 223)

Continuing this line of thought, Kugel comes to the conclusion that he is *opposed* to memory, as he cannot see anything good coming from remembering atrocities: "If you don't learn from the past, said someone, you are condemned to repeat it. But what if the only thing we learn from the past is that we are condemned to repeat it regardless?" (ibid.). Kugel's opposition to memory is mirrored early on in the novel in his dislike of attics, for example by him stating that "God he hated attics," (Auslander *Hope* 20), as the attic in the text symbolizes memory, a point further elaborated on in this sub-chapter with regard to the fictitious survivor-Anne Frank, and in this thesis in connection with the symbolism of houses.

Kugel's train of thought returns from the Balkans to the Fourth of July celebration: "[...] This sort of patriotism [of Americans on July 4th] worried Kugel, a worry he had inherited from his mother, who always told him it could happen here. What? It. What it, Mother? It it" (Auslander *Hope* 224). The patriotism of Americans celebrating their independence from Britain is positively connoted in the USA. It is, however, an idealized commemoration of a bloody colonial war. In Kugel's mother, and consequently in Kugel as well, this brings about instant fear of the German patriotism that preceded "it", the Holocaust, not called by its name by his mother, to Kugel's annoyance. If American patriotism should at one point (re-)turn into organized violation of its society's minorities' rights (as arguably has happened at least once *since* WW II, during the McCarthy era, to communists), the



Jewish American minority in the United States, for example, would stand little chance of resisting violent, organized anti-Semitism.

As Kugel's mother has fed a fear of an event like this in him ever since he was a little boy, now that he is an adult with a wife and child of his own, her fear, passed on to him in communicative memory (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*), has rendered him unable to live normally. Kugel wonders how his own son Jonah would react to having to hide in an attic (Auslander *Hope* 49), whether he could bring an iPod, keep up with his "dietary restrictions", and about the convenience of finding an attic "somewhere close by their home" (Auslander *Hope* 93). The absurdity of his thoughts about conveniences not necessary for survival nevertheless reveals a specificity with which he prepares for this unlikely event. First and foremost, he speculates on who would hide them:

Of the roughly 2,400 residents of Stockton, Kugel knew about twenty of them by name; of those twenty, there were probably a total of seven who would agree to hide him and his family in their attic (this was assuming that those seven hadn't already promised their attics to other Jews, blacks, homosexuals, Asians, Muslims, immigrants, etc., [...]). (Auslander *Hope* 92)

In his short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank", third generation Jewish American author Nathan Englander picks up the same question, calling it "the Anne Frank Game", "the Righteous Gentile Game", and "Who Will Hide Me?" (29); "[i]n the event of a second Holocaust," speculates one character in the story, "in the event of an *American* Holocaust," specifies another (ibid., my italics). Another, similar Holocaust "game" is presented in third generation Jewish American writer Ellen Umansky's short story "How to Make it to the Promised Land", in which children in a Jewish summer camp re-enact the struggle for exit visa from Europe pre-WW II. The fear of another Holocaust, if only masked in (children's) games, thus is a recurring topic in third generation Jewish American literature.

Kugel's mother has worked on instilling fear of this in her son from early childhood on. For example, she takes on the behavior of traumatized Holocaust survivors she reads about: "Downstairs, mother began to scream. [...] Mother screamed every morning. She had done so ever since reading that this was common behavior among survivors of the Holocaust" (Auslander *Hope* 37). She also does not unpack her suitcase after the move to the new house, "[j]ust in case" (ibid.). This Jewish mother type represented in Kugel's mother is strongly reminiscent of the smothering mother in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*.

In *Hope: A Tragedy*, the protagonist Kugel bears his mother's whims with stoicism. The tone of the novel is much less empathic and more detached

than the examples by Foer analyzed previously. Its humor is dark. While humor in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* serves as comic relief, it signifies a certain apathy in Auslander's novel. Laughter sticks in the reader's throat and is rather a sign of shocked disbelief than amusement at the supposed 'impudence' with which the text treats the iconic event of the Holocaust and the icon Anne Frank (as analyzed in the following). The question whether one is 'allowed' to laugh about representation of Holocaust related issues is a question discussed at length, for example in connection with movies like Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*<sup>43</sup>. Critical opinions on the appropriateness of humor in the depiction of such horror as the Holocaust are divided. Gross and Rohr state, for example, that critics

Des Pres and Rosenfeld, despite their disagreement about the appropriateness of comedy, actually *agree* about its formal structure, Rosenfeld arguing that resolution and catharsis transform historical agents into clowns, Des Pres suggesting that the same features reinforce comedy's independence from—even defiance of—actual history. (66)

Rosenfeld's opposition to Holocaust comedy, specifically Epstein's *King of the Jews*, as it is "bound to result in misappropriation," (Rosenfeld quoted in Gross and Rohr 65) seems to disregard the fictional aspect of literature, which, in Des Pres, is stressed:

There is a sense in which comedy is a metonym for fiction in Des Pres; what we laugh about in the end is the buffoonery involved in attempting to come to terms with history through art. (Gross/ Rohr 66)

Des Pres' "three basic tenets of the Holocaust representational "etiquette": the depiction of the Holocaust as a "unique" historical event, adherence to strict factual accuracy, and solemnity of tone (quoted in Gross/Rohr 65), however, seem to stand in direct opposition to the definition of comedy as something that makes fun of events or persons, for example using hyperbole. Auslander's novel breaks all three of these tenets: its humor relies partly on the paranoia of its characters about fear of another, American, Holocaust, denying the original event's "uniqueness". Facts are neglected, as the historical figure Anne Frank, known to have died at the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, is 'resurrected'. A 'solemn tone' is *not* adhered to, especially in the depiction of Anne Frank: In the situation of just having moved into a new house with his family, Kugel is confronted with tapping noises at night: "He heard something. [...] In the attic. [...] a tap-tap-tapping," (Auslander *Hope* 3), "Like typing almost," (Auslander *Hope* 10). He also notices a worsening stench, "Like sewage. Like rot," (Auslander *Hope* 20). When he goes

43     Original title: *La Vita è Bella*.

searching for rodents, Kugel discovers a “specimen of history” (Auslander *Hope*, book sleeve) in his attic: an old woman who claims to be Anne Frank. Ironically, she hides in the boxes containing the family’s stored belongings and Kugel’s mother’s hoarded matter. Labeled “JONAH-CLOTHES-WINTER, and another, beneath it, marked PHOTOS/MOTHER/1 OF 6” (Auslander *Hope* 22). This is strongly reminiscent of the memory boxes (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*) discussed in Foer (*Everything*). Kugel’s description of survivor Anne Frank is the opposite of a ‘solemn tone’: “She stank like decay, like death,” (Auslander *Hope* 22), and

she was hideous, horribly disfigured, and terribly old [...] the white of her right eye yellowed with age, the left eye clouded with cataracts, dead, unseeing. [...] Her shoulders hunched up around her ears, and a massive hump on her back forced her skull forward so that she faced the ground, head bowed, even when looking straight ahead. (Auslander *Hope* 25)

This description has nothing to do with the vision of Anne Frank as a smiling young girl, iconic through the surviving photographs of her. She is not presented as an aged version of the former, but explicitly rendered grotesque.

The woman in Kugel’s attic shows him her tattooed concentration camp number (Auslander *Hope* 27) and is generally very knowledgeable about the Holocaust, which is enough for him to believe she is telling the truth. Unlike Lista, the symbolic ghost character in Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated*, survivor-Anne Frank knows the war is over. However, she continues to live as if it were still going on. She writes her second literary work in Kugel’s attic, where she claims to have been for the past 30 years. In the novel, her own symbolism is apparent to her: “Anne Frank, said Anne Frank, is the most recognizable symbol of Jewish suffering and death” (Auslander *Hope* 265). She is the second, more important symbolic ghost character of Holocaust memory in the novel, at the same time suppressed and obsessed over.

Anne Frank, the historical figure, born in 1929, died in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. She would have been 82 in 2012, had she survived the concentration camp. The idea of presenting a survivor-Anne Frank in fiction is not new; Philip Roth writes about his character Zuckerman suspecting a young woman, Amy Bellette, of being a survivor-Anne Frank in *The Ghost Writer* from 1979. She reappears in his 2007 novel *Exit Ghost*, in which it is clarified that her being a survivor-Anne Frank was only part of the protagonist’s, Zuckerman’s, fictions. Philip Roth, called a ‘self-hating’ Jew for the critical content of his fiction, “puts at the center of his critique the Jewish community’s fascination with the Holocaust. He represents this fascination though the community’s idealization and idolization (fetishizing) of Anne Frank” (Budick “The Holocaust” 213). Auslander’s survivor-Anne Frank’s statements echo this criticism of ‘fetishizing’ the Holocaust, for example: “I’m

Miss Holocaust, 1945” (Auslander *Hope* 66). As the historical figure Anne Frank bears certain grave implications – she *is* a Holocaust victim who died in Bergen-Belsen as a child – Auslander’s use of her instead of a completely fictitious character is disrespectful on the one hand. On the other, it creates a powerful metaphor: The image of Anne Frank in the symbolic ‘attic’ of not only Jewish-, but collective cultural memory. Auslander is walking a thin line between humorous depiction of an ‘historical burden’ and an insult to the memory of an icon.<sup>44</sup> One aspect of an icon’s iconic state is her or his death. This point is made by Kugel’s wife, who claims nobody is interested in any writing by an Anne Frank who is *alive* (Auslander *Hope* 163).

Kugel’s words for describing the attic in which survivor-Anne Frank lives suggest associations of death and he speaks of ghosts and loss in connection with that space:

Kugel didn’t like attics [...]; the cardboard boxes, and plastic crates and leather trunks—tombs, sarcophagi—full of ghosts and regret and longing and loss; yet worse was the implication in all this emotional hoarding that the past was preferable to the present, that what came before bests whatever comes next, so clutch it to your chests in mourning and dread as you head into the unknowable but probably lousy future. (Auslander *Hope* 19)

This depiction of the attic is given even before he meets survivor-Anne Frank in it. It symbolizes his dislike of being confronted with suppressed emotions and memory. The *attic* as a space symbolizing repressed emotions has a prominent literary forbear: In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester’s first wife leads a secluded, hidden life in the attic of his mansion. She dies in a fire, and the heroine, Jane Eyre, can finally marry the hero. In later feminist theory, Bertha, the “madwoman in the attic”, plays an increasingly important role. In Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, she becomes the focus of attention, as opposed to the heroine of the novel, Jane Eyre. “The madwoman in the attic [...] stands for everything the woman writer must try to repress—though never with complete success—in order to write books acceptable by male standards,” (in Leitch et al. 1924).

In Auslander’s novel, the “madwoman” survivor-Anne Frank does not stand for issues repressed by female writers, but for repressed Holocaust memory. The woman Kugel finds is filthy, sly, and a grotesque caricature of the real-life heroine Anne Frank has come to represent in Holocaust commemoration. Auslander’s survivor-Anne Frank arguably is a more human

44 Iconic in the sense of e.g. Aleida Assmann and Corinna Assmann, cf. “Neda – the Career of a Global Icon”, esp. “The global icon as a carrier of memory” (pp. 232–242, in Assmann and Conrad).

representation than the image of the heroine that was created of the girl Anne Frank by her posterity. Survivor-Anne Frank in her attic is the embodied repression of Holocaust memory with regard to actual human beings, instead of the impersonal memory culture of monuments and Anne Frank as a literary symbol. The historical Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*<sup>45</sup> does not give a naturalistic description of the bodily functions. Auslander's text, on the other hand, is a scatological depiction of survivor-Anne Frank's attic life. The text's aim is not to disrespect historical Anne Frank's memory but to create an understanding of the realistic implications of survival. It addresses the question of representability of the Holocaust by showing that survival is not 'pretty'.

Survivor-Anne Frank is a full-time writer, working on her second book after her successful *Diary*, on a computer she has installed in the attic. She does not hoard objects herself, but lives among the stored objects of the Kugel family. Kugel tries to keep this ghost from the past, living in his house, a secret from his family and she annoys him with her demands: "Matzoh—12 boxes, Herring—1 jar, Borscht, Gefilte fish, Printing paper—3 pak (no holes), Mini-fridge" (Auslander *Hope* 75). Besides being humoristic, these demands can be seen, like survivor-Anne Frank herself, as symbolic. The memory of the Holocaust brings with it certain demands, namely to be upheld through every following generation, to not be meddled with, to not be (re)presented the 'wrong' way. What is the right or wrong way of representing the Holocaust is the question behind the symbolism of this interaction.

On the literal level of the text, survivor-Anne Frank, knowing what a mini-fridge is and requesting one for her typically Jewish food supply, is a humorous part in the novel. It also shows her adaptability to some present day conveniences. Survivor-Anne Frank's signs of being a survivor-sufferer of traumatizing events in the sense of Duggan are her disregard of hygiene and her seclusion in the attic. However, there is no account of further signs of traumatic suffering, such as recurring nightmares or flashbacks, no message or memory she wants to hand on to future generations. Her important testimony, her diary, is well known all over the world and now she wants to be recognized as an adult author and works on a 'career', that, as is known from her diary, the young historical Anne Frank had dreamed of. Her mere presence in the attic serves as a symbolic reminder of the Holocaust, and its collective trauma.

It is a telling aspect that the survivor-Anne Frank in this novel is not asked to 'come downstairs' and participate in regular family life with the comforts of a normal home, like a bathroom. She says herself that she cannot live 'comfortably' any other way but in attics; however, no one tries to even show her the comforts of proper sanitary care or food preparation.

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45 Original Dutch title: *Het Achterhuis*, published in 1947.

This is a statement on Western society acknowledging the trauma of the Holocaust but not acting openly and sufficiently upon it. Instead of asking survivor-Anne Frank to participate in everyday life, the Kugel family, that is him, his wife, and his mother, after having met her, try to make the attic more comfortable for her, e.g. by delivering a bed. Kugel's mother, in her Holocaust victim worship, creates a "pastoral, angelic" child's bedroom for survivor-Anne Frank, complete with a Hello Kitty alarm-clock (Auslander *Hope* 264). This is a belittlement of the Holocaust as a massive trauma-event and represents the mother's misguided 'interest,' which has turned into an obsession.

The Kugel family in this case is a symbol of society. The attic stands symbolic for repressed memory of the Holocaust and also substitute, ritualistic commemoration. Just as the Kugel family try to make the attic more comfortable for Anne Frank, society tries to give and find comfort in ritualistic commemoration of the Holocaust. That is, instead of acknowledging the horrors of the Holocaust in everyday life, there are isolated, ritualistic commemoration events. Like a wreath that is laid at a Holocaust monument on a historically important day, a bed is offered to survivor-Anne Frank. The dead cannot accept a wreath and Anne Frank, their symbolic ghost, cannot accept a bed. The text, thus, indirectly criticizes these rituals of memory as too removed from everyday, lived, personal empathy.

What happens in the other extreme, constant brooding over the Holocaust, its meaning and its consequences on a personal level, is symbolized in Kugel. A preoccupation with trauma can lead to the impossibility of dealing with everyday life. Asking Anne Frank to come downstairs would symbolize the allowance of Holocaust memory to have an individual personalized quality in people's lives. It would represent a way of dealing with trauma that helps understand and maybe partly overcome it, instead of supporting everything that suppresses it and having impersonal commemorative rituals. Commemorative rituals are necessary in an official historical acknowledgement of events. However, they cannot constitute the only means of commemorating the Holocaust, and certainly not on a personal level. They will become "increasingly empty referent[s]" just as Eva Hoffmann fears about distorted Holocaust representation (177).

The power struggle of memory becomes apparent in Kugel, who is torn between two extremes propagated by the two symbolic ghost characters in the novel, his mother and survivor-Anne Frank. They are representative of extremes in society: he wants to forget and suppress memory, as represented by the treatment of survivor-Anne Frank, yet, he is obsessing over the Holocaust compulsively, like his mother. Instead of publicly acknowledging survivor-Anne Frank, and getting her medical care, he takes on nursing her back to health in secret, in unworthy conditions. Like his mother, he is not

'working through' a trauma but 'acting out,' in the sense of LaCapra, a second- or third-hand trauma.

When Kugel chooses caring for the ailing Anne Frank over his family, choosing suffering, his wife and son leave him. While Kugel cannot keep sick survivor-Anne Frank from vomiting and defecating into the vents he muses, "Was this what he had allowed his home to become?" (Auslander *Hope* 257). He is unable to deal with memory in a 'normal' way, that is, inform authorities about Anne Frank and get her medical care, instead leaving her to rot, as she prefers. She herself, in the state of traumatization, cannot make reasonable choices. Kugel, in his 'second-hand traumatization' becomes equally unable to act. He develops a fear of life.

Auslander starts his novel with a well-known quote from Holocaust survivor Hadassah Rosensaft's memoir *Yesterday: My Story*: "We were liberated from death, from the fear of death; but the fear of life started." In the Jewish Women's Archive online, her entry, written by her son Menachem Z. Rosensaft, quotes the previous sentences, as well:

For the greater part of the liberated Jews of Bergen-Belsen there was no ecstasy, no joy at our liberation. We had lost our families, our homes. We had no place to go, nobody to hug. Nobody was waiting for us anywhere. We had been liberated from the fear of death, but we were not free from the fear of life. (159–160)

This kind of "fear of life" is a characteristic that Kugel and his mother both represent, although they are not Holocaust eye-witnesses. Indirect post-memory of the Holocaust is traumatic enough for them for it to rule their entire lives, making life unbearable.

For Kugel, 'catharsis' comes in the form of death by fire, as foreshadowed in chapters one and two, e.g.: "Solomon Kugel was lying in bed, thinking about suffocating to death in a house fire, [...]" (Auslander *Hope* 3). He dies in a fire set by his mother who burns survivor-Anne Frank's second manuscript, because she is not satisfied with it. Kugel can only try to save one person from the burning house, his mother or Anne Frank. Deciding for Anne Frank, he leaves his mother to her death and dies himself. While suffocating/burning, he, having become an extremely unreliable narrator in an increase of neurotic behavior, believes seeing Anne Frank rescued by Jewish public figure Alan Dershowitz, calling "You would have never have lasted five minutes in Auschwitz! I'm a survivor, Mr. Kugel!" (Auslander *Hope* 285). Anne Frank, a survivor yet another time, moves on to another attic. The novel ends not with Kugel's death but with Anne Frank finding new hosts for her symbolic self and her suppressed memory.

Survivor-Anne Frank is Holocaust-trauma and -commemoration personified. In her, it is shown symbolically that the Holocaust cannot be

banned to the attic of memory permanently; it will re-emerge, as traumatic ghost-like figure from the past. Anne Frank is a burden to Kugel, just as the memory of the Holocaust is a burden to humankind, a 'drawback of history', in the sense of Lowenthal, one would rather forget about, as its horror is traumatizing. Forgetting, due to the risk of repetition, is not an option, neither is repression nor obsessive preoccupation with the Holocaust, as the novel suggests. An eventual 'lesson' from the novel is that there is no escaping the past, but dwelling on it does not make it more plausible, explicable, or bearable. In the end Kugel burns like Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. His death is symbolic of burning in an 'oven', as his mother predicted, or the proverbial burning in hell. Kugel is 'burnt up' by trying to come to terms with the horrors of the Holocaust on a personal level. The reason for his burning is his obsession with and repression of memory at the same time.

In conclusion of this chapter, the following can be stated generally about the symbolic ghost characters analyzed so far: They can be male or female, and they bear several or all of the following traits:

They are elderly, first generation survivors. This means they have lived through the Holocaust, have witnessed it, and are traumatized by it.

They dwell in remote places, or attics, or spare rooms. This separates them physically and mentally from the rest of the world. Their 'exile' is usually voluntary and connected to their trauma.

They are seldom seen. Because of their choice to separate themselves physically from society, they do not appear in public often. If anyone sees them at all it is usually only one person at a time.

They are hoarders of objects. By collecting things that are of symbolic representative value, they try to commemorate traumatic events, collective identities, and individual humans. Storing these objects, for them, is storing specific memory. The people whom the objects used to belong to cannot take care of the storage themselves. The ghosts act as mediators for the dead, storing memory for following generations.

They seem to be from another time. Past, present, and future are not separable concepts for them. Re-experience of trauma-events ties them to the past, making present life difficult and rendering thoughts of a future impossible. This becomes apparent in their language and behavior.



They have trouble communicating. Being at a loss for words to describe their trauma is something these ghosts have in common.

They themselves are living monuments, or storage media. They are alive to give testimony, if contacted and asked. Sometimes they write their testimony down, either due to the aforementioned difficulties in direct communication or to make it available to a wider audience.

They are sometimes teamed up with another person. This other person can be more anchored in the real and the present, and can be from a different generation.

They search for, and sometimes attain, catharsis. This catharsis can take place many years after the catastrophe. They can also help others to achieve catharsis. An inter-generational *handing over* or *passing on* of memory responsibility can accompany the cathartic moment. Characters of both following generations play roles in these exchanges. If the person receiving the responsibility is adolescent or a young adult/of the third generation, this is usually a major aspect in their process of initiation (cf. Genep and Freese).

### 3.2 Symbolic Characters and Memory in Krauss' *The History of Love*

Nicole Krauss' second novel, *The History of Love*, endows several well-rounded characters with symbolic value, representing the three themes connected to memory discussed previously, the ghost, the writer, and the family-member, with possible overlaps. The complexity of the novel demands a brief overview of characters: It contains three interconnected plotlines and four protagonists with distinct voices, representative of three generations: The Polish immigrant to New York City, Leopold Gursky, in the first plotline, is a first person narrator protagonist from the Holocaust eye-witness generation. He is accompanied by an imaginary friend, Bruno. Alma Singer, living in New York with her family, is the first person narrator protagonist of the second plotline. She is a representative of generation three, as is her brother, Bird, who is given a distinctive first person narrative voice in her plotline, as well. The generation in between consists of Alma's and Bird's parents, British immigrant Charlotte and Israeli immigrant David Singer. David Singer has died of cancer, and Charlotte is not given a distinctive voice. Another representative of generation two is Leopold Gursky's son

Isaac Moritz. He is the child of Leopold and his love Alma Mereminski, also originally from Poland, who has, however, married another man. Leopold is not in contact with his son. Isaac Moritz is an author and uses a pseudonym, Jacob Marcus, to ask Charlotte Singer to translate *The History of Love* into English for him, a novel he only owns in Spanish and particularly likes. Alma Singer was named after the protagonist of this novel. The author of this novel is actually Leopold Gursky. He gave it to his Polish friend Zvi Litvinoff for safekeeping during the war. Zvi, the protagonist of the third plotline, has immigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and plagiarizes the book in order to impress his wife Rosa, believing Leopold to be dead. In the end, Leopold Gursky and Alma Singer meet, connecting the different plotlines. It becomes apparent that, as similar to Foer's storyline of *Everything is Illuminated*, the second generation is not a focus of the novel. Generations one, the witness generation is tied more closely to generation three, the grandchildren. While the generation in between is represented as almost passive, generation three is inquisitive and active.

Memory is the underlying theme of this novel. There are two symbolic ghost characters who symbolize Holocaust memory, Leopold Gursky and Bruno. Bruno meets mainly the ghost criteria. He is the focus of sub-chapter 3.2.1. Leopold is a character who is analyzed with regard to the other two themes of character symbols of chapter 3.3.2, *writers*, and 3.4.1, *family*. In both of these further focal points, the Holocaust plays a role with regard to him. However, the aim of this work is to show that Krauss as a third generation Jewish American writer, although including complementary Holocaust plotlines, adds other topics to her work. The chapter on symbolic family member characters, therefore, in addition to analyzing Leopold Gursky's family-memory, focuses on the representation of two third generation members. They are siblings and enter divergent paths with regard to their religious development, exemplifying different variations of Jewish identity in America today.

Writers and family, as topics connected to memory represented in Krauss' work, transcend the topic of the Holocaust: Writing and writers as a universal literary topic and as a particularly self-reflexive Jewish topic, and family in a new way of representation, overcoming Jewish representational stereotypes. In Krauss in particular, some examples are given as to how she goes beyond stereotypical representations of characters that her male contemporaries, analyzed exemplarily, Foer and Auslander, still uphold. These are, in particular, a Holocaust stereotype of a mother who has lost her child, as represented in both works by Foer and the smothering Jewish mother-type, as represented in Auslander.

### 3.2.1 Ghosts and Historiographic Metafiction

Nicole Krauss' novel *The History of Love* represents Jewish American issues on three different generational levels, from four protagonist's perspectives. This chapter focuses in detail on the representation of two characters bearing symbolic value as ghost characters and establishes the connection to the writing of Krauss' contemporaries Foer and Auslander, analyzed previously.

The most prominent ghost-like symbolic characters in Krauss' writing are Bruno and Leopold Gursky. They meet several of the criteria listed in chapter 3.1. As Bruno is an imaginary figure, he shares some of these criteria with his 'creator', the character Leopold Gursky. Further characters in this novel can be classified as symbolic ghost characters and are mentioned but not analyzed in depth. Some of them, as does Leopold Gursky, qualify as symbolic writers and family-members, as well. The plotline containing the two ghost-like first generation characters focuses on Holocaust memory. It is narrated from the point of view of Leopold Gursky, an old Jewish immigrant to the U.S.. Leo (this abbreviation is used henceforth) has lost everything to the Holocaust: His mother and siblings were massacred by Nazis in his hometown in Poland. The love of his life, Alma Mereminski, was sent to safety in the USA by her parents and they lost contact because of the war, although she was already pregnant with his child. He assumes that his work, the manuscript of his novel *The History of Love* (Leo 3) which he had given to his friend Zvi Litvinoff for safekeeping, is also lost. Several versions of the manuscript are referred to in the novel, thus they are numbered.

Every narrative strand in this text by Krauss is represented by a symbolic image printed at the beginning of the chapter to indicate shifts in narrative perspective. Leo's symbol is an anatomically correct heart. This may be referring to a heart-attack he survives, and also to his broken heart in his love to Alma Mereminski, as he states that he re-directs psychological pain to different organs in his body. Leo's name is derived from the Latin word for lion, *panthera leo*. The lion, as a strong and 'royal' animal, is a symbol of the Jewish tribe of Judah, for example, of which king David is descended from. This name reflects the strength of its character, and his being Jewish. Leo's strength, however, lies not in his physical capacity but in his mental ability to work through his traumata.

Leo is a survivor-sufferer in the sense of Duggan with traumatic Holocaust experience. He lives alone. However, Leo does not voluntarily seek loneliness. Quite on the contrary, he makes a point of being noticed by people so that he does not go unnoticed on the day of his death (Krauss *History* 3/4). He signs up as a nude model for a drawing class because it means that many people look at him and see much of his body: "It seemed too good to be true. To have so much looked at. By so many" (Krauss *History* 4).

Leo is also a hoarder. The novel opens with him quoting from his self-written obituary: “LEO GURSKY IS SURVIVED BY AN APARTMENT FULL OF SHIT [sic!]” (Krauss *History* 3). He has to “struggle to keep a path clear between bed and toilet, toilet and kitchen table, kitchen table and front door” (ibid.). It is never mentioned *what* he is hoarding in his apartment. The statement that he hoards, however, shows his fitting into the category of symbolic ghost characters analyzed previously. The path he clears illustrates what his life revolves around: sleeping, eating, and bodily functions, the basic necessities for survival. The passage to the front door of his apartment needs to be free for food delivery services, not for visitors.

As he has no friends or family he is in contact with, Leo has created an imaginary figure, Bruno, to keep him company. He imagines Bruno to be living in the apartment above his after the previous renter has died of old age. Although, in the beginning of the novel, the text represents Bruno as a regular character in the narrative, several indicators point toward the fact that Bruno is a dweller in Leo’s imagination. The first impression the reader has of Bruno, however, is that he is a ‘real’ character, when Leo tells the story of how they ‘met’ in New York. Their (re-)encounter is described as an unlikely but possible incident from Leo’s perspective:

I didn’t know he [Bruno] was still alive and then one day I was walking down East Broadway and I heard his voice. You’re hearing things, you’re such a dreamer, what is the likelihood—your boyhood friend? I stood frozen on the sidewalk. *He’s in the ground*, I told myself. You are here in the United States of America, there’s McDonald’s, get a grip. (Krauss *History* 5, my italics)

The facts that Leo mentions, not knowing that Bruno was still alive and calling him a “boyhood friend”, lead to the assumption that Bruno is an old acquaintance from Poland of about the same age. Leo ‘hears’ Bruno before he ‘sees’ him. This establishes that it is an involuntary memory or *mémoire involontaire* in the sense of Proust, in this case the sound of a voice, that triggered Leo’s imagining Bruno. As he later describes Bruno as having a very distinct voice, hearing a similar voice may have been enough to recall him. The statement “he’s in the ground”, contrasted with Leo telling himself he is in the United States, leads to the assumption that Bruno is a friend or acquaintance who, unlike Leo, did not manage to leave their native Poland, and that Leo therefore assumed him dead as a victim of the Nazis.

Leo referring to himself as a *dreamer* in this quote is the most important hint at Bruno not being ‘real’. In recounting a dream about his younger brother Josef, whose grey eyes he likens to the color of an elephant, Leo remembers ‘seeing’ an elephant in the town square of his Polish hometown Slonim when he was Joseph’s age: “Plain as day, standing in the dusty sunlight” (Krauss *History* 19). Leo does not use the word ‘imagined’ but the

word 'saw', although from context it becomes clear that he is recounting a fantasy and not fact. He is the only one to have 'seen' the elephant in a busy town square, which indicates it was not there: "Later no one could remember having seen it, and because it was impossible to understand how an elephant would have arrived in Slonim, no one believed me. But I saw it" (ibid.).

An 'elephant' is mentioned several times in the text and bears different symbolic implications. In this particular situation, it stands for the power of Leo's imagination. As a child, he finds himself different from other boys his age. He is deliberating this situation when he first 'sees' the elephant: "I knew I was imagining it. And yet. I wanted to believe. So I tried. And I found that I could" (Krauss *History* 228). He has managed to convince himself of 'seeing' an elephant, not merely imagining it. That is why he is able to uphold the illusion to himself that he has a friend, Bruno, in his last years of his lonely life in New York.

Bruno is given distinct character traits and described in detail, as an old man and as a boy. 'Old Bruno' is described thus:

Bruno, my old faithful. [...] Is it enough to say he is indescribable? [...] The soft down of your white hair lightly playing about your scalp like a half-blown dandelion. [...] Or perhaps I should begin with your height, which is very short. On a good day you barely reach my chest. Or shall I start with the eyeglasses you fished out of a box and claimed as your own, enormous round things that magnify your eyes so that your permanent response appears to be a 4.5 on the Richter? They're women's glasses, Bruno! (Krauss *History* 6)

The use of the term "indescribable" on Bruno is a hint at him being an imaginary figure. As Bruno is a character symbolic of Holocaust memory, it is also reminiscent of the impossibility to accurately describe the Holocaust (cf. Lyotard as quoted in Gross/Rohr). His size is reminiscent of a child who, used as an obscure intertextual reference to Oskar Matzerath of Grass' *Tin Drum*, has not grown in Leo's memory since he last saw him. Other elements point toward Bruno being a very old man, however, like the downy white hair and huge glasses. Leo also recounts memories of 'young Bruno':

We've known each other since we were boys; we went to school together. He was one of my closest friends, with thick glasses, reddish hair that he hated, and a voice that cracked when he was emotional. (Krauss *History* 5)

This detailed description and the recount of their re-encounter are given after Leo describes his heart-attack and his then feeling even lonelier than before as he does not go back to work: "I was aware of time passing for the sake of itself" (ibid.). In retelling the story of his heart-attack, Leo invokes

the metaphor of an elephant again: “[...] suddenly it was as if an elephant had stepped on my heart” (ibid.). The elephant in this context signifies bodily pain of unknown origin. The fact that Bruno ‘appears’ after this life-threatening situation shows that Bruno is invented by Leo at this crucial time in his life, the end of his life, in order to counter his immense loneliness. Describing a laughing fit he gets into ‘with Bruno’ for no reason, Leo says he is “[...] laughing so as to forget that I am *alone*, that this is the end of my life, that death is waiting outside the door for me” (Krauss *History* 7, my italics). Leo ends his thoughts of Bruno by apologizing to the ‘real’ Bruno, in a form of conversing with the dead, about the image he has created:

When we were boys you were the greater writer. [...] It pains me to think of how I never told you, and also to think of all you could have been. Forgive me, Bruno. My oldest friend. My best. I haven’t done you justice. You have given me such company at the end of my life. You, especially you, who might have found the words for it all. (Krauss *History* 6)

The hint about Bruno being a better writer than Leo points toward one specific aspect of this imaginary symbolic ghost character. In Bruno, Leo has ‘created’ a character which contains the traits of three different people. Toward the end of the novel, Leo acknowledges openly that he has created and imagined ‘old’ Bruno and that on the other hand there is a ‘real’ Bruno who his creation is modeled on:

He’s the friend I didn’t have.  
[...]  
He’s the greatest character I ever wrote.  
[...]  
He’s dead.  
It hurt to say it. And yet. There was so much more.  
He died on a July day in 1941. (Krauss *History* 249)

Leo having ‘written’ the character is the most specific statement about Bruno not being real. However, the specific date of death is the strongest indicator of a ‘real’ model for the imagined Bruno. Aspects supporting this interpretation, and further points that in summation lead to the conviction that Bruno is imaginary on the one hand and a mix of ‘real’ characters on the other, are summed up in the following.

One possible interpretation is that parts of Leo himself in a dissociated state are represented in Bruno. For example, Leo could be referring to his own metaphorical ‘death’ after the trauma of witnessing his family being killed when he states that Bruno died in 1941. When Leo recounts an attempted suicide by Bruno, he most likely refers to an experience of his own.

Leo and the imaginary Bruno do not 'speak' of this suicide attempt: "We never spoke of it after that. Just as we never spoke of our childhoods, of the dreams we shared and lost, of everything that happened and didn't happen" (Krauss *History* 7). By using the verb 'to speak', Leo is rather implying that he does not *think* about and tries not to *remember* these dreams, his lost opportunities, and the death and loss of people dear to him. He is in a state of suppressing these traumatic memories and instead focuses only on survival. He does not, however, suppress memory in general. He cherishes the memory of his love for Alma and his memory of beginning to be a writer, for example. Milan Kundera, in his novel *Identity*, describes the value of positive memory for the maintenance of personal identity:

Remembering our past, carrying it around with us always, may be the necessary requirement for maintaining, as they say, the wholeness of the self. To ensure that the self doesn't shrink, to see that it holds on to its volume, memories have to be watered like potted flowers, and the watering calls for regular contact with the witnesses of the past, that is to say, with friends. They are our mirror; our memory; we ask nothing of them but that they polish the mirror from time to time so we can look at ourselves in it. (43)

In Bruno, Leo has imagined or (re-)created such a witness of the past. He maintains this image in order to be able to gain a clearer picture of himself. Bruno is a positive memory from the past which helps Leo to keep from 'disappearing', in reference to the novel's dedication<sup>46</sup>. General narrative hints that Bruno is imaginary are given when Leo states that they do not speak much at all: "If it happens to be Bruno [at the door], I let him in *without a word*" (Krauss *History* 3, my italics) and "We often sit together *without our saying a word*" (Krauss *History* 6, my italics). Words are not necessary if one is holding an inner monologue, rather than a conversation with another person. At the same time, this represents a loss of words for the unspeakable, the Holocaust trauma.

Bruno is the only character to have no last name in the novel. His representing a memory of a childhood friend of Leo's is reflected in the spelling mistakes in 'Bruno's' notes to Leo. They are mistakes a child would make, e.g. "LIFE IS BUTIFUL [sic!]" (Krauss *History* 79). This echoes Leo describing Bruno as very short (Krauss *History* 6). Over time, Bruno's role diminishes in the novel, as Leo finds his literary voice again, even after the renewed personal catastrophe of his only son's death. At the end of the novel, Bruno stops appearing. This absence is noted but not questioned further by Leo as would have been the case had Bruno been 'real'.

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46 "FOR MY GRANDPARENTS, who taught me the opposite of disappearing," (Krauss *History*, dedication).

With Leo, Krauss has created an *unreliable rememberer* in the sense of Aleida Assmann, when it comes to his invention of Bruno. As he has outlined how he can convince himself of seeing whatever he wishes to, readers know to question Leo's statements. Leo is in a state of *disremembering*, in the sense of Toni Morrison's term, "a state between remembering and forgetting, describing the status of trauma" (Assmann *Introduction* 169). He has reconstructed his memory of Bruno and, re-shaping the past, imagined, over several years, that his friend was with him in New York, living in the apartment above his. He has thus created a false memory. When confronted with his past through the re-appearance of his manuscript he is confronted with the truth of Bruno's death and so is the reader. This is yet another instant exemplifying a power struggle of memories, in this case of individual memories and their contribution to individual identity.

There is another possible interpretation of who Bruno is modeled on and there are several aspects in the text that support this thesis: Bruno is referred to as a talented writer by Leo (Krauss 2006:6). The Polish author Bruno Schulz is a historical figure, whose name, native country, and profession tie him to imaginary Bruno. It is possible that Leo's reference to a writer friend Bruno is meant to reflect that as a young writer in Poland, Leo admired the Polish writer Bruno Schulz and may have imagined a friendship with him.

The historical Bruno Schulz' death occurred on November 19, in 1942, while Leo refers to Bruno having died in July, 1941. Historical accuracy is not the point of the text, however. Parallels in aspects of Leo's and Bruno's and Bruno Schulz' character are highly suggestive of a likeness created purposely. The best known work of historical Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*, from 1934, is mentioned several times in *The History of Love*. Leo's son, Isaac Moritz, for example, reads and discusses it (Krauss *History* 103). The figure of speech "and yet," repeatedly used by Leo, is a figure of speech found often in Bruno Schulz' work *The Street of Crocodiles*, as well. This establishes a connection between the two texts and echoes the phrase of the dedication "the opposite of disappearing" as a statement of defiance. Leo uses this statement, for example, when he 'sees' his image fade in in photographs<sup>47</sup>. It symbolizes his coming to terms with his traumatic losses and his reclaiming his life. In an entry in *The Future Dictionary of America*, Krauss defines the term "and-yet" at length:

'And-yet' can be a reminder of all that will go unsaid. Of a chance someone is holding out for. [...] In two syllables it can sum up the existential doubt that's

47 Not seeing himself in photographs he is in is an instance of 'chosen blindness' similar to Foer's symbolic ghost character Grandfather in *Everything is Illuminated*.



tied like a stone to each of us. It's also Jewish. [...] 'And-yet' guards against simple conclusions. [...] 'And-yet' can sometimes be funny. It's almost always bittersweet. But it's never tragic; by the time there is time to say 'and-yet', the tragedy is already past. Which is to say, 'and-yet' is almost always reflective. *It was terrible. And-yet.* As in, I'm still standing, there's light in the morning, the smell of breakfast, what can I tell you, I suppose the world continues to turn. (in Eggers et al. 14/15)

Her entry partly reads like an explanation of the term's use by Leo in *The History of Love*. Many of his memories 'go unsaid'. Despite his traumatic experiences related to the Holocaust, he is a character who is 'still standing'. He is able to reflect on his past tragedies and still has a will to live, and a purpose, writing, as is analyzed in the next sub-chapter.

Another parallel between the novel and the historical Bruno Schulz is to be found in Leo's manuscript. After having given it to his friend Zvi Litvinoff for safekeeping, Leo assumes his manuscript lost. Bruno Schulz is rumored to have also given a manuscript to non-Jewish writer friends to ensure its safety (Foer *Tree* 137, "Author's Afterword"). As a Jew he feared for his life and, although under the personal 'protection' of a Nazi officer, was shot in the streets of his hometown in 1942 by another Nazi officer. In his introduction to a new edition of Bruno Schulz' *The Street of Crocodiles*, David A. Goldfarb states how "[R]umors surface periodically of the lost manuscript of a novel, *The Messiah*, a copy of which he [Schulz] is said to have sent to Thomas Mann" (xiii). The implications of this rumor are unfathomable: either the manuscript was lost, or Mann used Schulz' material (which would have been found out by forensic linguists by now), or Mann chose to destroy or hide the material. A reappearance of the manuscript would be a sensation in the literary world. As futile as speculation about this question is, this parallel adds mystery and tragic depth to the character of Leo.

There are more explicit literary references to Bruno Schulz than the ones Krauss makes. For example, Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* deals with the supposed reappearance of the manuscript of *The Messiah*. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* is an altogether different, yet very direct literary monument to Bruno Schulz. He literally *cuts out* letters and words from *The Street of Crocodiles*, leaving actual, haptic gaps in the pages<sup>48</sup>. By doing so, he creates a new story, as the words and letters he leaves *in* connect to new meaning. The title exemplifies this: ***The Street of Crocodiles*** (bold letters by me, highlighting Foer's title creation by cutting out letters of Schulz' title). This commemorative creation of 'something' from 'nothing' is strongly remini-

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48 As a possible name for this new literary technique I suggest the Greek term for 'gap' or 'cut-out', *apospasma* (ἀπόσπασμα).

scent of Boltanski's project of art *Missing House* in Berlin, described in chapter 3.1.2 (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*).

The title of Schulz' missing manuscript, *The Messiah*, adds to the sensation a reappearance would create, as it invokes the Jewish belief that the Messiah, the son of God and king of the Jews, prophesized in the Torah, will one day appear on earth (or as Christians believe, re-appear). Foer draws further semi-religious parallels in his "Afterword" by referring to the remaining wall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem reminding readers of the loss created through the Temple's destruction (*Tree* 138):

Like the Wailing Wall, Schulz' surviving work evokes all that was destroyed in the War: Schulz's lost books, drawings and paintings; those that he would have made had he survived; the millions of other victims, and within them the infinite expressions of infinite thoughts and feelings taking infinite form.

Foer's book/art, Ozick's and others' novels, and Boltanski's project are all artistic, impressive, and effective forms of commemorations of loss. The same commemoration of loss is achieved by Krauss' novel *The History of Love*, however, with less focus on the novelty of the representative idea. Krauss' text treats this subject matter in a more contained way. There is no pushing of the issue to the foreground and no particularly new or inventive way of (re-)presenting it in her novel. Therefore, in her work there is no danger of what Eva Hoffman calls 'hypermemory', discussing dangers of later generations' Holocaust fiction. Krauss' text neither gives too little space to Holocaust representation and memory, nor too much and is neither too vague nor over the top in its representation.

Krauss' character Leo is continuously engaged in turning 'nothing' into 'something' and the reader is enabled to derive from the imaginary, non-existent Bruno and from his creator, Leo, an image of a historical, literary person who actually existed, Bruno Schulz. In the symbiosis of the symbolic ghost characters Leo and Bruno, Krauss' text creates literary memory of and a monument for the historical figure Bruno Schulz. The complementary Holocaust-related plotline of Krauss' novel shows that literary memory is able to transport aspects of what was lost in the Holocaust, functioning as a storage medium. In difference to Foer and Auslander, Krauss does not represent the violence and bloodshed of the Holocaust literally, but indirectly, by showing what was lost to one of her protagonists, Leo. The few lines actually describing Nazi atrocities are unspecific and do not depict these atrocities in detail. It is described, for example, how Leo *hears* the shots that kill his family, but nothing else.

In crossing reality and fiction by presenting fictitious memories of a real historical period, and a fictitious character with traits of a real historical figure, a piece of 'historiographic metafiction' in the sense of Linda Hutcheon

is created by Krauss. Bruno, Leo's imaginary friend, is a victim, a symbol for who/what was lost: The Polish born author Bruno Schulz, praised as "one of the most gifted writers to have come out of Eastern Europe in the twentieth century" (book sleeve). The loss of Schulz' unpublished work, and more importantly, the loss of his person to humankind, can be seen as a symbol of *all* loss in the Holocaust. For Leo, and for the reader, the fictitious Bruno is a symbol of the Jews murdered in Poland, of all Jews who did not survive the Holocaust, and of all the things and thoughts lost together with the people. He also stands for an individual person, Bruno Schulz. This makes him an example of individual memory and collective memory at the same time. An aspect of an individual memory in the novel, Leo 'remembering' Bruno, is representative of collective memory of the individual author Bruno Schulz and, at the same time a monument to the memory of six million Jews killed in the Holocaust.

The narrative technique is one of leaving content gaps, or blanks, in the text, gradually to be filled by the readers. This is the parallel in narrative structure to the object-manifestation or haptic quality of Boltanski's *Missing House* and Foer's *Tree of Codes*. Ideally, the narrative blanks in the text create curiosity in readers and animate them to fill these blanks by interpretation. Wolfgang Iser, in *The Act of Reading – A Theory of Aesthetic Response*<sup>49</sup>, talks about this particular narrative concept of leaving blanks in a text, to be filled in by every reader individually, to create meaning.

In Krauss' novel *The History of Love* there are references to the Holocaust although the author has not witnessed it firsthand. As Jessica Lang says in her essay on Krauss, "History and imagination, the *gap* separating them and the bridges built to connect them, define third-generation Holocaust literature in general" (50, my italics). Although there must obviously be blanks, things that Krauss cannot know, she has created a picture of certain Holocaust aspects that appear realistic to her readers because they are familiar with historical facts and because she describes realistic human everyday interaction.

Other blanks, in the sense of Iser, are created on purpose as a narrative device stimulating constitution of meaning in the readers. These are two different kinds of blanks in Krauss' text, the one a given aspect of any later generation's writing on historical events, as the past cannot be fully known (cf. Lowenthal), the other a purposely employed narrative strategy. Krauss turns these two kinds of blanks into an advantage in fiction; the readers are prepared to fill blanks through combination and imagination. Thus, an intersection of knowledge is created, as in a mathematical intersecting set, in

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49 Original German title: *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*.

which room is left for imagination on the author's and on the readers' side, while both share a common ground of overlapping interpretation constituting meaning. "This kind of indeterminacy," states Iser about a text containing narrative blanks, "functions as a propellant—it conditions the reader's formulation of the text. [...] As the unwritten text shapes the written, the reader's 'formulation' of the unwritten involves a reaction to the positions made manifest in the text, which as a rule represents simulated realities" (Iser 182). This is a strong argument in favor of the fiction being an art form that involves readers actively in the process of creating meaning. "As an empty space [blanks] are 'nothing' in themselves, and yet as a nothing they are a vital propellant for initiating communication," says Iser (195). Following this line of argumentation, Holocaust fiction, and narrative blanks it contains, make an important contribution to Holocaust memory by involving readers actively in the construction of meaning in the text. This might be a more effective way of keeping Holocaust memory from being forgotten than the rather passive and impersonal form of commemoration of a visit to a monument, for example<sup>50</sup>.

The indeterminacy mentioned by Iser is not to be confused with another kind of gap in a text: Ingarden's "place of indeterminacy," as Iser points out, a term which "is used to designate a gap in the determinacy of the intentional object" (ibid.). He contrasts this with his definition of a blank: "The blank, however, designates a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns. In other words, the need for completion is replaced here by the need for combination" (ibid.). With regard to representation of violence, for example, *The History of Love* differs from Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Both Foer's novels are rather explicit in representing violence. Krauss' text, in the Ingardenian sense, leaves out graphic depictions of violence. She draws on the fact that the readers are knowledgeable about Holocaust violence, and that explicitness is not necessary to represent its horrors. This gap can be filled by the readers to an extent they *choose* to imagine violence, in order to give the text meaning.

The imagined figure of Bruno with its implications of the memory of a real person, however, constitutes a blank in the sense of Iser in the text, as the readers need to combine information to fill in questions they have of the plot. After the "perspectives have been linked together, the blanks 'disappear,'" according to Iser (183). The readers realize that Bruno is imaginary and contains different characters after actively constructing meaning of the text. All this adds to the ghost-like qualities of Bruno as a symbolic charac-

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50 It depends on an interest in reading, however, which is, unfortunately, said to be declining in Western society. A combination of different commemorative forms, therefore, is necessarily the best way of meeting diverse kinds of interests.

ter. He is not *one, real* character, but a mixture of several characters, transcending time and clear definition. Discovering Bruno's symbolic representation of the author Bruno Schulz is a 'puzzle' for informed, interested, and specifically thorough readers.

Another aspect is of interest with regard to texts and blanks: The form of use of blanks in (Holocaust) writing apparently follows the function, when it comes to representing trauma. Patrick Duggan refers to Roberta Culbertson in discussing trauma, who

proposes that survivor-sufferers experience a 'temporal blanking' in which the mind continuously records the passage of time during trauma, but the mind leaves 'a particular stretch simply open, the images and experience [are put] elsewhere, not accessible to the normal process of constructing a narrative of one's life.' (Duggan 24, paraphrasing and quoting Culbertson 175)

This 'blanking' experienced by trauma victims is represented on the narrative level in Krauss' and the other texts analyzed, in the form of narrative blanks. Temporal blanks are eventually re-experienced as 'trauma-symptoms' by survivor-sufferers, as a permanent suppression of trauma is not possible since the mind of the survivor-sufferer is set on constructing meaning. In a way the reading process emulates this, as readers try to construct meaning, the difference being that readers actively and painlessly struggle for meaning construction, while trauma victims are overwhelmed by passive, unwelcome, and painful memory, which they sometimes try to actively suppress. Readers, although they do not feel the pain of the represented trauma, can empathize with traumatized persons by piecing together the aspects of their suffering. Visual blanking, as in selectively not being able or willing to see things, is represented in Foer's symbolic ghost characters Grandfather in *Everything is Illuminated*, grandmother in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and Krauss' Leo. Blanks in written text are used in grandmother's overuse of spaces in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in Foer's complete removal of words by use of apospasma in *Tree of Codes*.

The use of different kinds of blanks and the different implications these blanks have for the levels of the text in third generation Jewish American writing show a wealth not only of perspectives and content matter, but also of narrative technique. As shown, especially with regard to the Holocaust-related symbolic ghost character, the application of the narrative technique of blanks is a fitting one in its form and function. It mirrors unrepresentability of trauma in direct words in a narrotological way, by representing trauma indirectly.

### 3.3 Symbolic Writer Characters

Writing is an important storage medium of memory. It can be used to store factual knowledge and fiction. In the tradition of fiction writing, the writer as a character in a narrative has a long-standing tradition. *Self-reflexivity* of the writer (as well as of the narrator, protagonist, or author) and *intertextuality* are regarded as aspects prevalent in *postmodern* literature; however, they have always been aspects of literature and are undergoing a phase of extreme popularity and creativity at the millennial turn.

“[A]mong the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning,” as Linda Hutcheon states in “Historiographic Metafiction” (7). The terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘intertextual’ have both been defined in many ways. I use the term ‘postmodern’ as defined by Linda Hutcheon:

The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should by analogy [to the 1980 Venice Biennale’s theme: “The Presence of the Past” in architecture], best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. (3)

The quote explains how Hutcheon differentiates what she calls historiographic metafiction from “traditional historical fiction” (ibid.). In her opinion, thus, the concept of postmodern writing is intrinsically tied to intertextuality in ‘echoing texts from the past’, for example. These echoes from the past are encountered in ghost character symbols analyzed in the previous chapters.

The concept of ‘intertextuality’ is best defined by Gérard Genette, according to Manfred Pfister (Broich/Pfister 16). He states that Genette’s *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* is the most extensive draft of a theory of intertextuality, meaning references between literary texts (although expressing dissatisfaction with Genette inaccurately using the palimpsest metaphor) (ibid.). What Pfister calls *intertextuality* (“Intertextualität”) as the general main category of all references between texts, Genette calls *transtextuality* (“Transtextualität”). Genette’s very inclusive overview of varieties of his transtextuality encompasses the following main categories<sup>51</sup> (Broich/Pfister 17):

Intertextuality (“Intertextualität”): the co-presence of texts, for example in quotations, allusions, or plagiarism

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51 My, slightly paraphrased, translations of Manfred Pfister’s German translation of Genette’s terms in *Intertextualität*.

Paratextuality ("Paratextualität"): references between the text and its title, preface, afterword, motto, and the like.

Metatextuality ("Metatextualität"): a commenting, often critical reference to what he calls a pre-text ("Prätext"), an earlier text.

Hypertextuality ("Hypertextualität"): a text making another text a foil through imitation, adaptation, sequel, parody, etc.

Architextuality ("Architextualität"): the genre affiliation of a text.

I proceed to use the term intertextuality as the overall general reference term and point out references to Genette's particular use of it.

Ulrich Broich points out that contemporary literary criticism is dominated by the notion of *every* text being intertextual (as a general category) in all its elements, using Julia Kristeva's approach as an example (in Broich/Pfister 31). Broich's own, more exclusive, approach requires the author's *intention* and the recipient's *consciousness* of used references between texts in order to speak of true intertextuality (ibid.). The texts analyzed in my work display intentional intertextuality on the authors' part in the form of Genette's terms intertextuality, paratextuality, and, arguably, hypertextuality. The readers' consciousness of these literary references is not essential to their understanding of the novels. It contributes, however, to a more informed and pleasurable reading experience.

Self-reflexivity in writing, in the form of the self-reflexive writer as a literary persona or of a text reflecting itself, has been a dominant one from William Shakespeare, in whose *Sonnets* a lyrical "I" reflects itself, its motifs, as well as the beauty of poetry in general, to postmodern writer Jorge Luis Borges' "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", reflecting aspects of authorship, plagiarism, intertextuality, and appropriation, as well as the topic of artistic freedom. In contemporary Jewish American writing, as in literature in general, representation of the writer as a literary character, reflection of the creative process, and references to other literary works form a continuation of tradition. The traditional theme, *writing*, therefore, has earned the label of being a 'dominant' topic in writing in general and in Jewish American literature in particular. Like the symbolic *ghost* character, the symbolic *writer* character is to be found generally in third generation Jewish American writers' works.

Foer and Auslander, three works of whom have been analyzed with regard to symbolic ghost characters in chapter three, also create symbolic writer characters: In Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, the third generation protagonist Jonathan is planning to write a book about his journey to Ukraine. This becomes clear in the correspondence he has with Alex, his

guide and translator. A fictitious *History of Trachimbrod* intersects with the narrative plot of Alex's and Jonathan's journey, adding magic-realist background to the place of memory that they discover.

In Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the child protagonist Oskar Schell maintains a scrap-book, in which he collects mainly images, but also writing. He calls it *Stuff That Happened to Me* (Foer *Extremely Loud*, e.g. 52) and uses it like a diary. Like the fictitious history of Trachimbrod in *Everything is Illuminated*, the scrap-book pages interspersed with the narratives are a postmodern element to the novel. They introduce images reflecting the experiences Oskar has in New York City. Some images can be connected to the text right away, with others the reader needs to fill in interpretative blanks. In his diary writing and in literary references made to Oskar reading Stephen Hawking's works (Foer *Extremely Loud* 11), Foer's Oskar Schell is linked to Krauss' Alma Singer (analyzed in upcoming chapters) thematically, in his concern for a secular, scientific world view inherited from his father. In the protagonist's name, Oskar, informed readers find an intertextual reference to Grass' Oskar Matzerath, as discussed. Direct quotes from Hiroshima and Dresden bombing survivors constitute further intertextuality.

The two ghost characters grandmother and Thomas Schell Sr. both write sets of letters that also constitute narrative strands. Schell Sr. writes "day-books" (Foer *Extremely Loud* 17) filled with stock sentences, as he has stopped speaking altogether. He also writes letters to his son whom he never meets in person as he leaves the family before his son is born. His letters are all headed "WHY I'M NOT WHERE YOU ARE" (Foer *Extremely Loud*, e.g. 16) and are explanations of his traumatized behavior. Typographical extravagances are typical of Foer; in his fictional history of Trachimbrod, he uses curved headlines to mark the chapters, for example. In Schell Sr.'s unsent letters to his son, there are pages consisting only of numbers (Foer *Extremely Loud* 269-272), exemplifying his loss first of letters, then of words, and finally of speech altogether. After he recounts how his grandson plays the last recording of Thomas Schell Jr. from the burning World Trade Center, Schell Sr.'s words are printed tighter and tighter until letters overlap each other and the pages are almost black with letters, symbolizing the flood-like 'crowding in' of traumatic memory (Foer *Extremely Loud* 281-284). Grandmother writes letters to her grandson, entitled "MY FEELINGS". She uses extra spaces after every sentence (e.g. Foer *Extremely Loud* 75-85). She also pretends to type her life story but does not put ink in her typewriter, which leaves her with piles of blank pages, referring to her emotional emptiness due to her trauma (Foer *Extremely Loud* 120-124).

In Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy*, the main figure of interest is a writer, a fictitious survivor-Anne Frank, working on another manuscript after her diary's success. Intertextuality is employed in the reference to the literary fig-



ure Anne Frank, which takes on aspects of hypertextuality (cf. Pfister, in the sense of Genette) in its pseudo-parodic nature. In addition, the protagonist Solomon Kugel reflects on classical literature dealing with the Holocaust on a philosophical level, such as Adorno's dictum about writing poetry after Auschwitz. In Krauss' novel *The History of Love*, lastly, almost every character is a writer of some kind, and several characters take on symbolic value as writers. Thus, Krauss' text serves as an excellent example of representation of the theme of writing and symbolic writer characters. Writing, in her novel, is partly Holocaust-connected, partly oriented toward other themes. Symbolic writer characters in Krauss are discussed generally in the following chapters and a specific focus is then directed toward Leo's writing about his life, as it has cathartic qualities for him. The number of intertextual references to *fictional* works in all novels analyzed (see my bibliography) additionally points out the texts' extensive occupation with writing and writers.

### 3.3.1 Writers and Writing in *The History of Love*

The heterogeneous nature of the minority group of Jewish Americans is represented in varied symbolic characters by Nicole Krauss. With regard to the aspect of writing, her text contains old and young writers, male and female ones, original writers, a translator, and a plagiarizer. *Writing* is invariably connected to the inseparable aspects of *identity* and *memory* by Krauss. *Finding words*, in some cases for the unspeakable, is a recurring motif in all three generations represented. In writing, they store ideas and memory. Some of the writing processes in *The History of Love* take place because of or are about traumata. Represented writers write to pass on knowledge, sort their private thoughts, for therapeutic reasons, to impress others, or simply for the enjoyment of artistic expression. In their writing, they leave something of themselves for posterity, as proof that they existed. In the following, a brief overview is given of who writes what in Krauss' novel.

Coherence demands clarification as to which version of *The History of Love* is being referred to. Therefore, the following system is used. Reference to *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss is indicated by her name, for example in parentheses. The novels within the novel are marked as follows: Leopold Gursky's first unpublished draft of *The History of Love* is: (Leo 1), the second draft is: (Leo 2). The third draft is the version of *The History of Love* which Leo intends for publication and gives to his friend Zvi Litvinoff: (Leo 3). Zvi's plagiarized and translated version is: (Zvi 1), Charlotte Singer's translation of the text to English is (Zvi 2). Leo's *Words for Everything*, containing rewritten parts of *The History of Love* (Leo 3) is marked (Leo 4 Words).

Krauss' text contains three first generation writers, Leopold Gursky, Bruno, and Zvi Litvinoff. Leo as a writer is analyzed in detail in the next chap-

ter. He puts his love for and memory of Alma Mereminski into his writing. His first novel, *The History of Love* (Leo 3) is for and about her. His second novel, *Words for Everything* (Leo 4 Words) contains part of what he remembers having written in *The History of Love* (Leo 3), as he considers the manuscript lost. It is also the story of his life. As the title suggests, it is about everything that has happened to him, and about his struggle of expressing it in words. He writes his second novel for his son, with the aim of expressing his love, but also transmitting personal memory to the next generation. Bruno, as discussed in detail as a symbolic ghost character, is a historiographic metafictional representation of the Polish writer Bruno Schulz. The historical Bruno Schulz is someone who, as an accomplished literary artist, may have found words to describe the Holocaust, as Leo suggests. He is, or was, "the better writer," according to Leo, "who would have found words for it all (Krauss *History* 6)." 'It all' refers mainly to the atrocities of the Holocaust in this context. Through Bruno Schulz' death, the world has been deprived of the (literary and other) art he would have been able to create in his further life, and of possible 'explanations' of the workings of WW II politics and society. The symbolic character Bruno, thus, in his function as a *ghost*, is equally functioning as a *writer* character symbol in the novel.

Zvi Litvinoff, a writer friend of Leo's in Poland, is, next to Leo and third generation representative Alma Singer (and partly her brother Bird Singer) a main protagonist of the novel. Chapters representing his point of view are marked by the symbol of an open book. Unlike Alma's and Leo's narrative, they are not told from a first person but from a third person perspective. Zvi is a plagiarizer. Leo Gursky gives his friend Zvi the manuscript of *The History of Love* (Leo 3) for safekeeping. Zvi eventually plagiarizes the novel, thinking Leo has not survived the Holocaust. He translates the novel into Spanish. Zvi realizes early on that Leo is a better writer than him, nevertheless his is the symbol of the book. He is the person who, through plagiarizing Leo's manuscript, saves it for posterity. Writing is important for him as he identifies himself as a writer after having fled into exile in Argentina. Giving off the aura of a mysterious poet, he manages to impress the woman he loves, Rosa. He plagiarizes the manuscript not for any specific reason, but partly to impress Rosa and to have something to show for himself. As a Holocaust survivor he suffers greatly from the loss of his family, especially his sister Miriam, and does not have any interest in life until he meets Rosa. Believing Leo dead he takes the opportunity to publish his work under his own name. Zvi feels guilty about this and about not telling Rosa the truth all his life.

He is not able to produce satisfactory work of his own, therefore takes something that is already there and passes it off as his own work. Most of the time, he is blocking out all memory of the fact that he is not the author

of the manuscript. He *chooses* to forget this. However, there are things that he cannot forget, like what happened to his family during the Holocaust, after he had been able to escape:

Bit by bit, Litvinoff learned what had happened to his sister Miriam, and to his parents, and to four other siblings (what had become of his oldest brother, Andre, he could only piece together from probabilities). He learned to live with the truth. Not to accept it, but to live with it. It was like living with an elephant. (Krauss *History* 156)

Here the elephant is used as a symbol in the sense of the proverbial ‘elephant in the room.’ The elephant in Zvi’s life is the Holocaust. It renders him a traumatized person unable to lead a life of his own. Just as he cannot forget the Holocaust he can also not *truly* forget that he has plagiarized Leo’s novel. It leaves him with another kind of survivor guilt. Not only has he survived his entire family, but also a friend who trusted him with his work. By passing off this work as his own, he is twice guilty of surviving, in his own understanding. His way of redeeming himself is his adding Leo’s obituary to his version of the novel: “CHAPTER 39: THE DEATH OF LEOPOLD GURSKY” (Krauss *History* 189). Thereby he includes a hint, if only understandable to him and Leo himself, that he acknowledges Leo as the true author of the novel:

Which is why, when [...] Litvinoff died quietly in his bed bathed in sunlight, he didn’t take his secret with him. Or not entirely. All anyone had to do was turn to the last page, and there they would find, spelled out in black and white, the name of the true author of *The History of Love*. (ibid.)

Having thus admitted the true authorship, Zvi can die ‘peacefully’. His process of plagiarizing *begins* by manually copying Leo’s writing in his own handwriting, thereby ‘making it his own’, in the postmodern sense of Borges, for example. The chapter heading “Until the writing hand hurts” mirrors this process (Krauss *History* 119). The process of ‘making it his own’ is continued then by translating the manuscript into Spanish, and finally by typing it and burning Leo’s instructional envelope. Rosa, who finds out the truth because Leo writes to her asking for the manuscript, finishes the process of obscuring the true author by destroying the original manuscript in a feigned ‘flood’. Despite the eradication of the evidence, however, the truth is still available in Zvi’s and Rosa’s memories. It is something that stands between them as an unspoken problem, like another elephant.

Despite his dishonesty regarding his friend’s work, betraying him of his authorial ‘fame’ or recognition, the manuscript is saved thanks to Zvi. If not for him, it would have been destroyed, as Leo would have not been able to

keep it in his yearlong struggle for survival. The mystery, encrypted intertextually in this plotline, of Bruno Schulz's last manuscript, asks the question of whether Zvi's plagiarism is justifiable. This is not something the text chooses to answer. It opens up a reflection on authorship, appropriation, and memory transmission, e.g. with regard to which means are 'allowed' in the transmission of memory. The image of Zvi dying peacefully in a sunlit bed is a narrative indicator of the redeeming quality of the fact that he has saved Leo's work for posterity balancing his 'sin' of having 'stolen' it.

Second generation writers in *The History of Love* are Isaac Moritz, Leo's son, and Charlotte Singer. Charlotte Singer is not a creator of original texts, she is a translator. She lives the life of a hermit after her beloved husband's death. Translating the novel he had once given to her, *The History of Love* (Zvi 1) from Spanish into English (Zvi 2) is a reviving task for her. She connects the novel with her love for her husband and with his memory. It is Isaac Moritz who commissions the translation, without knowing that the work he admires and would like to read in English was written by his father and then plagiarized and translated from Yiddish into Spanish. Through this translation commission, the plotlines of generation one and two are connected and a connection is also established between two different narratives in the text, Leo's story and Alma Singer's story.

The processes of writing original works and translating existing works are similar insofar as they are both concerned with 'finding words.' This process of finding words is a process of constructing meaning. *Translation* can refer to a text but also to life and the self, as 'translation' of the self can refer to transformation<sup>52</sup>. The translators are themselves transformed by the construction of meaning, their identity construction being affected by it. As Charlotte translates the text, she is drawn into reality again, after mourning the death of her husband for a long period of time. She is transformed by the translation, as is Zvi, who, by translating Leo's work, takes on the identity of an author of a specific text. This way of seeing translation as construction alludes to the reconstruction of memory with regard to identity (cf. Asmann *Introduction*), as well. One can also say that, as the past is never fully knowable (cf. Lowenthal), every generation has to 'translate' the last generation's memory to an understanding of their own, finding and constructing meaning.

Leo's son Isaac Moritz, giving Charlotte Singer the translation task, is using a pseudonym, Jacob Marcus, to commission the work. He is a famous writer himself and wishes to obscure his true identity. He wants the text to be translated because he connects it to a specific memory. It is not specified

52 cf. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III, Scene 1, [enter Bottom with an ass' head]: "Bottom, thou art translated". Here: translated = transformed. Latin: translatus = carried over.

in the text but the reader assumes it was his mother reading part of the original of *The History of Love* (Leo 3) to him when he was a child. This memory has stayed with him all his life so that at the end of his life (he is dying of an unspecified illness), he wishes to read the text in a language he can fully understand. Little is to be found out about the character Isaac in the novel. However, Leo states how he is very proud of his son's achievement as an author and how its beauty makes him cry. He makes it a habit to look for his son's work on other people's book shelves. He presents his thoughts on his favorite work by his son, the short story "Glass Houses" (Krauss *History* 23/24): It is about an angel who is angry with god because he sees sadness in the world. In the end he drowns because someone punches him and he falls into a river. God does not save him, even though he is an angel. The symbolism in the story refers to the question of how an almighty, loving god can allow sadness and violence, how he can possibly choose to not intervene. Isaac's story bespeaks of second generation postmemory (cf. Hirsch), as the questions about how the Holocaust could happen, without human or divine intervention, is passed on from the eye-witnesses to the next generations, consciously and unconsciously, as the defining chapter on memory research and terminology has clarified. This fictitious text within a fictitious text triggers an emotional reaction in the fictional reader Leo, as well as in the (implied) reader of the novel, as both make the Holocaust connection by filling in narrative blanks (cf. Iser).

The third generation protagonists in *The History of Love*, finally, David and Charlotte singer's children Alma and Bird, are both journal writers and survival chroniclers. Alma Singer writes down what happens to her in a journal called *How to Survive in the Wild* (Krauss *History* 45). Her writing consists of memories of her father, worries about her mother and brother, lists of things, and 'regular' diary entries of a teenage girl, concerned with her body, and meeting a boy. Alma's writing is influenced by their father's love of nature and his preoccupation with survival.

As stated in the chapter on symbolic family characters, the loss of their father and his memory has a deep impact on both children and how they form their identities. Alma, who remembers her father, still has problems coping with losing him. Bird is too young to remember much about his father. He is troubled by not having any memory of his father which results in an inability to cope with the loss, because of an inability to mourn him properly, without any memory of him. Bird shows signs of severe psychological problems caused by his father's unprocessed death. He is in therapy but withholds his true thoughts from the therapist. Only in his diary does he reveal his real thoughts. Bird uses the identification with Orthodox Judaism as a lifeline connecting him to his dead Israeli father. The delusion that he might be the Messiah is shown in the content of his writing but also in

the way he treats his manuscript: He writes the name of god on each page in Hebrew, thereby marking it to be kept 'forever', as something marked with 'the name', *Hashem*, in Orthodox Jewish belief may not be thrown away (Krauss *History* 149). When he finds Alma's journal he acknowledges its importance the same way, by marking each of its pages with god's name (Krauss *History* 151). The siblings are readers of each other's diaries, and both acknowledge that they write in order process their father's death.

*The History of Love* not only contains several writer characters, but stresses its affinity to literature by an abundance of intertextual references and literary allusions. An understanding of these is not necessary to *comprehend* the text. However, understanding the references and allusions leads to a heightened sense of appreciation of contexts and helps text recipients fill in narrative blanks easier and in a more creative way. When, for example, fictitious statements by author Philip Roth and Holocaust survivor and writer Leon Wieseltier, praising Isaac Moritz' work upon the announcement of his death are presented in the novel, this stresses the character Isaac Moritz' standing in the fictionalized literary world and establishes connections as to his identification as a particularly *Jewish* writer. The reference to Bruno Schulz and his work has already been discussed in detail; it is, presumably, the most important literary reference in the novel.

Many more writers are mentioned in passing, adding depth to the importance of literature for the novel. Jorge Luis Borges, mentioned earlier in connection with postmodernist aspects of writing, is discussed in Zvi Litvinoff's plotline, creating for those familiar with his short story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"<sup>53</sup>, an interesting parallel to Zvi's plagiarism, as its protagonist justifies copying Cervantes' text word by word, yet calling the text 'his own', as the process of appropriation through copying equals creation to him, automatically including his interpretation, therefore his *version*, of the text. Alma Singer walks in on her mother reading Cervantes and translating the poets Nicanor and Neruda, and she herself admires Antoine de St. Exupéry's life and writing as she sees in him the kind of adventurer her father was.

### 3.3.2 Writing as Cathartic Experience

Young Leo is symbolic of the figure of 'the' aspiring young writer. He writes for his muse, Alma Mereminski, to express his admiration and to impress her. He always wanted to be a writer, even as a boy: "When I was a boy I liked to write" (Krauss *History* 7). Leo describes how "I [Leo] invented imaginary people and filled notebooks with their stories" (ibid.). He has a 'cir-

53 Original title "Pierre Menard, Autor del Quixote." In the journal *Sur*, Argentine, 1939.

cle' of writer friends, Bruno and Zvi, and writing is a form of expressing his extraordinary imagination and helping him cope with his being different than other boys.

Writing is generally a coping mechanism for Leo, as it revitalizes him when, toward the end of his life, he starts writing again and finishes a second manuscript, *Words for Everything* (Leo 4 Words). This second published manuscript, like the first one, *The History of Love* (Zvi 1), is not attributed to him. As he sends the manuscript to his son, who then dies, it is found in his son's house and attributed to him. It is deemed his best work, a literary success, which gives great satisfaction to Leo. Additionally, his manuscript of the *History of Love*, (Zvi 2) deemed lost by him, 'reappears' in translation at the end of his life. Although his family line becomes extinct with his death, his ideas live on in his two novels. The aspect that his *History of Love* is plagiarized is of no relevance; the *survival* of the manuscript and his knowledge of authorship are enough satisfaction for Leo. The text's treatment of plagiarism alludes to the question of what non eye-witnesses are allowed to write about the Holocaust. The text's conclusion to this question is that survival of Holocaust memory is of primary importance, and that the *form* the survival takes on is secondary.

In picking up writing again very late in his life, Leo becomes a symbolic writer character who successfully overcomes the horrendous adversities of his life, through the power of creativity, expression, and imagination. As a boy, Leo already dabbles in writing. These 'exercises' do not appear to satisfy him as a writer. He stresses the word 'real' by repeating it in the following statement: "When I got older I decided I wanted to be a *real* writer. I tried to write about *real* things. I wanted to describe the world, because to live in an undescribed world was too lonely. I wrote three books before I was twenty-one, who knows what happened to them" (Krauss *History* 7, my italics). The three books he is referring to are his different versions of *The History of Love*. Leading up to the version that Leo and his critic, Alma, deem fit for eventual publication (Leo 3), Leo writes two draft versions: The first one, (Leo 1), contains only facts, mainly about Slonim, his home town. Alma prefers him to invent things, so version two (Leo 2) is full of inventions. Alma then says she enjoys him inventing *some* things, not *everything*. So he writes version three (Leo 3): "This time I didn't write about real things and I didn't write about imaginary things. I wrote about the only thing I knew" (Krauss *History* 8). The reader knows this 'thing' to be his love for Alma Mereminski.

Remembering the day he first 'saw' an elephant in his hometown, Leo also remembers that "I let myself see more and believe more" (Krauss *History* 230). He imagines things for Alma, who is impressed by his imagination, like wings for her, because he idealizes her as an angelic figure (ibid.).



However, constantly imagining things has left him unsure about what is real and what is not: "And now, at the end of my life, I can barely tell the difference between what is real and what I believe" (ibid.). Discussing his survival in the woods after his family was massacred, eating raw rats and drinking from puddles, he says he only wanted to survive for the sake of his love for Alma (Krauss *History* 226). However, she had told him she did not love him and when she left for America that was, to her, a separation on purpose. Leo, however, changes this memory in his mind: "I made myself forget. I don't know why. I keep asking myself. But I did" (ibid.). Leo's 'forgetting' about Alma breaking off their relationship is indicative of its traumatic impact on him. As it constituted an extremely painful memory, his consciousness shut it off.

Leo's strong imagination is a coping mechanism which makes his life easier, on the one hand. It is a gift, which not many people have and which is part of his being a writer. Imagining things and people has come easy to him since his childhood and still does at old age. That is why he is able to start writing again, after many drawbacks. It is also representative of the selective nature and unreliability of human memory in general in the biological sense and serves to illustrate well how humans construct their life-stories and identities (cf. Assmann *Introduction*). With regard to his love for Alma, his imagination has caused him much additional pain in his choice to 'forget' that she had left him.

When Alma leaves for America, not knowing she is pregnant, asynchronous communication via letters is the only way for Leo and Alma to stay in touch. Because the entire world is plunged into World War II, communication gets lost. They send each other letters that do not arrive (Krauss *History* 11/12). At 25, Leo comes to America to find out Alma has born their son and is married to another man. She explains her actions in two short sentences: "You stopped writing. I thought you were dead" (Krauss *History* 13). This represents writing literally as a matter of life or death and is a strong intertextual reference to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the lovers' plans are smitten by an undelivered message. Considering the title of Krauss' novel, *The History of Love*, a reference to the most famous lovers of literary history is a prerogative. The tragedy of Alma and Leo's star-crossed love partly resembles Romeo and Juliet's love as circumstances outside their power prevent them from being together. However, no further connections should be made rashly, as appropriation of the Romeo and Juliet material bears certain pitfalls. In Shakespeare's play, it is strongly implied that the feuding families are punished for their behavior by the deaths of their offspring. Alma and Leo neither die, nor can the Holocaust be viewed as a punishment in any way. This is, in fact, the reason, why the Hebrew word *Shoah*, catastrophe, is highly preferable to the word *Holocaust*, as the ety-



mology of the word Holocaust suggests the offering of life as religious atonement for sin, demanded by god, as discussed earlier (cf. Gross/Rohr).

Leo never takes up writing as a career after his Holocaust survival in the woods and his immigration to the USA. He resumes writing only after a heart-attack. The love referred to in the title of the novel refers to love between humans, foremost Leo's romantic love for Alma. However, it also is a history of the love of books, the written word. Love of writing is what eventually brings catharsis to Leo, not his unrequited love for Alma. He makes his peace with his love for Alma when she is dying and he visits her in the hospital. His love for writing, however, never truly ceases, and he resumes it close to the end of his life.

Writing, for Leo, stands for the process of finding words for things, events, and experiences. In old age, Leo's writing also correlates with remembering and finding words for memories. At the end of his life, Leo is writing book number four, *Words for Everything* (Leo 4 Words). His first sentence is "Once upon a time there was a boy" (Krauss *History* 9). The process of writing again is very slow and he only brings himself to start because "[he] knew [he] would never show a word of it to anyone" (ibid.). He is writing the story of his life, for himself. This means partly rewriting *The History of Love* (Leo 3). The original text is stored in his semantic memory, at least in parts, as the reader learns: "There are passages of my book I [Leo] know by heart" (Krauss *History* 10). Eventually he writes more, finishes the manuscript, and does send it to another potential reader, his son.

What is different for Leo in his late life as a writer is that he is, this time, not writing to impress Alma, thus: "It didn't matter if I found the words, and more than that, I knew it would be impossible to find the right ones" (Krauss *History* 9). Leo is adding sentence after sentence, sometimes not writing for days, as if carefully trying out and negotiating what he had once wanted to make his profession. He does want his son to know who his father was, and the essence of himself, in his opinion, can be found in his lost novel *The History of Love* (Leo 3). So he rewrites it. This novel within the novel, existing in several versions, languages, and countries, in itself is a reference to Holocaust writing in its various forms of eye-witness testimony, memoirs, fiction, and mixed forms including historical facts and historiographic metafiction. Thus, inter-, para-, and hypertextual references are declared important aspects of the novel by the text itself.

As discussed, Leo states that his greatest achievement as a writer was 'writing' Bruno. When he comes to describing his 'encounter' with Bruno he makes a point of stressing that they do not 'speak' Yiddish together, as "Life demanded a new language" (Krauss *History* 6). Opening his apartment door to Bruno, he "let him in without a word" (Krauss *History* 3). As is clarified later, words are not necessary, as Bruno is imagined. The reader

associates the inability to find words for and after such an atrocity as the Holocaust, as mentioned by many survivors and historians, with trauma. The trauma-influenced inability to find the right words to describe the Holocaust led to a widely proclaimed theorem of its unrepresentability. Yet, representations were and *are* created. The imperative of having to talk about the Holocaust so as to prevent history from repeating itself, under the postulate “never again,” is equally strong.

Old Leo is a character symbolic of those who wrote to find words in the face of adversity. He, later in his life, writes ‘after Auschwitz.’ “Fiction on the other side of the temporal divide created by the Holocaust draws on the element of reassembly of the fragments of a forgotten world,” says Goldfarb (xxiii). Leo, in his writing, is symbolic of those who tried to accomplish that. Rediscovering his voice is participating in active life again, doing things “like a normal person” (Krauss *History* 121, Leo, on drinking coffee). “There are things I find hard to describe. And yet I persist like a stubborn mule in my efforts,” Leo states (*ibid.*). Writing is his coping mechanism for trauma. As a survivor-sufferer (cf. Duggan), his suffering is eased by the ability to find words for it. “It could be my epitaph: LEO GURSKY: HE TRIED TO MAKE SENSE” (*ibid.*), he says, showing his concern with describing and thereby representing human life as coherent.

When, unbeknownst to Leo, Bird delivers his mother’s translated version of Zvi’s *History of Love* (Zvi 2) to Leo, and Leo finally finds out his manuscript has survived, he says he “fell back into my memories” (Krauss *History* 119). Leo is shocked to find his work survived. “Over and over I read the pages of the book I’d written as a young man. It was so long ago. [...] How did it survive? As far as I knew, the only copy was lost in a flood. I mean if you don’t count the excerpts I sent in letters to the girl I loved” (Krauss *History* 121). He can only speculate at the survival of the manuscript. More important than the circumstances of its survival are the memories it brings back and the sense of fulfillment in life he achieves.

Describing his violent nightmares, Leo states what he would have liked to dream instead: “I’d like to say: I dreamed that the girl I loved and I grew old together. [...] I’d like to say, I dreamed that I’d died and my book was found among my things, and in the years that followed the end of my life, I became famous. And yet” (Krauss *History* 80). Of his two dreams, living with Alma and being a ‘real’ writer, the second one comes true, as his life is almost over. It becomes clear that his love of writing is as great as his love for Alma, if not greater. The imagined ‘memory’ of growing old with Alma is a very private one, while his idea about being a writer involves public memory, or even fame. Imagining his own death, he connects his life to his writing:

At times I believed that the last page of my book and the last page of my life were one and the same, that when my book ended I’d end, a great wind would

sweep through my rooms carrying the pages away, and when the air cleared of all those fluttering white sheets the room would be silent, the chair where I sat would be empty. (Krauss *History* 9)

The motif of Leo's death is present during the entire novel. He has been concerned with the wording of his obituary all his life, for example. The novel, like the plagiarized version of the novel within the novel (Zvi 2), ends with his self-written obituary:

#### THE DEATH OF LEOPOLD GURSKY

Leopold Gursky started dying on August 18, 1920.

He died learning to walk.

He died standing at the blackboard.

And once, also, carrying a heavy tray.

He died practicing a new way to sign his name.

Opening a window.

Washing his genitals in the bath.

He died alone, because he was too embarrassed to phone anyone.

Or he died thinking about Alma.

Or when he chose not to.

Really, there isn't much to say.

He was a great writer.

He fell in love.

It was his life. (Krauss *History* 254)

The obituary makes clear that Leo is writing about his love of Alma and about his love *of writing*. He loved Alma and in a sense lived for her. However, he also fell in love with writing, and writing, not necessarily his love for Alma, may be interpreted as having been 'his life'. As terrible as Leo's trauma is, he is a character who actively works through it and who dies at peace with all his losses, thanks to his ability to write.

"The Book" is one of Schulz' leitmotifs, according to David Goldfarb<sup>54</sup>. He sees a general influence of Schulz' work on later writers (xxiii). This way, memory of an author's work is carried on into subsequent generations. Goldfarb groups later writers referring to Schulz into three categories. The first one is defined thus: "Polish and other Eastern European writers whose work is part of a continuous tradition with interwar avant-gardism, who have incorporated Schulz's motifs, compositional techniques, and mytho-

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54 For the nuances cf. the Polish references by Goldfarb (xix) and his suggestions for further reading (xxvii-xxix).

logical sense into their own work<sup>55</sup> (ibid.). The second group to be influenced by Schulz, according to Goldfarb, are “mainly Jewish writers who may know Schulz only in translation and do not have access to the wealth of Polish critical writing on Schulz [...] but find in Schulz a connection to the lost world of pre-Holocaust European Jewry, and see Schulz’s death as a particularly poignant symbol of that loss” (xxiv). Goldfarb names Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and David Grossman as examples; all three writers create characters based on Bruno Schulz (ibid.) in *The Prague Orgy* (Roth 1952), *The Messiah of Stockholm* (Ozick 1988), and *See Under: Love* (Grossman 2002). “The manuscript of the Messiah can thus serve as a vessel for a metaphor of the tragic end to an age of genius. Schulz is also fascinated with a lost age of genius, but the task for Schulz is its restoration through the poetic, rather than lamentation of the loss” (Goldfarb xxiv).

A ‘restoration through the poetic’ describes Leo’s last life phase in Krauss’ novel. He regains his voice as an author, and is thereby able to work through his trauma. As a ‘reward’ of fate, when he reaches that point, he discovers that his *History of Love* (Zvi 2), has survived in translation, after all. “The most recent examples of Schulz’s influence recognize the universal significance of his mythic world, assembled from what seem to be deeply personal and esoteric local references” (Goldfarb xxiv). This constitutes the third group, and Goldfarb compares this kind of writing to the magic realism of Salman Rushdie, for example (ibid.). It can be found in Foer’s fictitious history of Trachimbrod, as well, and is echoed in stories within Krauss’ *History of Love*, like chapter ten, “The Age of Glass”, in Leo’s *The History of Love* (Zvi 2). Krauss’ text is thus equally influenced by Schulz in the sense of the second and the third group of writers named by Goldfarb. She creates her characters Leo and Bruno as literary reminiscences of Bruno Schulz, representing what was lost in him. At the same time, her focus is not the loss but survival and the overcoming of loss.

The characters in Krauss’ text are empathetic, and manage to *create* empathy, which makes it an important contribution to Holocaust representation in literature. The importance of empathy creation in the discussion of trauma is stressed by LaCapra, for example, in his preface to *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, with regard to historiography and truth claims. The following quote is an extension of this idea toward other representation of trauma, such as fiction:

I [LaCapra] argue that truth claims are necessary but not sufficient conditions that must be cogently related to other dimensions of historiography, including

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55 As examples of this first group he names Polish artist and dramatist Tadeusz Kantor, or Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš.

empathic, responsive understanding and performative, dialogical uses of language. (xii)

The “empathic, responsive [and performative], dialogical use of language” in *fiction* meets this demand by LaCapra. He stresses the importance of empathy with regard to dealing with and understanding trauma. It might take an artist, an author in this case, sometimes, to tell a story in a way that makes it appropriate for reception without losing authenticity, yet, adding artificial aspects, for the sake of empathy creation.

### 3.4 Symbolic Family Characters

Representation of the family and family members as symbolic characters in Krauss are the topic of this chapter. Love, loss, and (religious) identity development in a Jewish family in millennial America are family-related issues Krauss’ text *The History of Love* represents. Family memory plays an important role in Holocaust memory. This is demonstrated by analyzing further aspects of the character Leopold Gursky, who, as a character symbolic of Holocaust memory, writing, and as a symbolic father and also son, is the character representative of all three major themes connected to memory in Krauss’ novel.

Second and third generation family representation in Krauss contains non-Holocaust-related narration. In the family plotline with second and third generation members, the Holocaust does not play a direct role, although it is mentioned, for example in the naming of the third generation children. However, the death of the second generation father can be interpreted as mirroring the Holocaust catastrophe to this particular family to some extent, as discussed in the sub-chapter concerned with the Singer family, 3.4.2.

Foer’s text represents a *newer* form of traumatization by terrorist attacks, assisted by side plots about WW II trauma in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, which not only re-traumatizes first generation members by triggering their suppressed WW II memory, but also traumatizes a third generation child. Retraumatization is a term LaCapra (in *Writing History*) uses also in connection with *collective* traumatic memory as something that needs to be ‘worked through’ by collective mourning of trauma events. The characters in the novels are symbolic as survivor-sufferers in the sense of Duggan, and mourners. Krauss chooses to represent an event mirroring next-generational trauma by an illness such as cancer. The effect of a common societal consciousness concerning cancer is similar to the collective memory of terrorist attacks. Both are omnipresent in most media and a source of fear in those who have not experienced them and trauma in those who have.

Both are reminiscent of Holocaust trauma not in comparison of the trauma-events, but in the suffering of specific traumatized characters.

The family is a private space where memory is passed on and its representation needs to be analyzed as a microcosm of memory representation and transmission before conclusions can be drawn about the symbolic value of these representations with regard to collective memory on a larger scale such as a nation's like America's, or an ethnic groups' such as Jewish Americans' memory. Stephen Wade calls family experience a "massive area [...] that has not been perceived as important in the earlier phase of Jewish-American fiction (1945-80s). The Jewish Family has either been the site of surreal comedy (*Portnoy's Complaint*) or stereotype social humor" (85) he says. The overbearing mother in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* makes Alexander Portnoy's life unbearable, which contains a strong humoristic element<sup>56</sup>. However, this also creates a distance between readers and the material covered, as a close identification with neither Portnoy, nor his mother is truly possible. The family situation represented in Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* is a very similar one. The characters, especially the mother, are overtly parodic stereotypes. However, the Holocaust as a topic makes laughing about the stereotypes difficult.

Krauss' text, in contrast, does not contain stereotypes of the Rothian kind, such as the grotesquely exaggerated Jewish mother. A more realistic approach is made toward family representation, although the mother represented in *The History of Love*, Charlotte Singer, is a character who loves her children very much. Not exaggerating this love to a grotesque extent, represents a breach with a dominant stereotype and its presentation in Jewish American literature. This is why the family issue as treated by Krauss is termed an *emergent* issue in my work. It becomes clear in aspects such as this one that some third generation authors, for example Krauss, although drawing on residual and dominant topics, present new, emerging topics, and find new ways of presenting topics, without reverting to stereotypes, for example in character creation.

The families represented by Krauss are broken families. They are not broken, however, due to partners' inability or unwillingness to stay together because of different love interests, sex interests, boredom, or estrangement. Instead, the families in Krauss are torn apart by circumstances outside their powers. As a collective universal memory in Western society, one of these circumstances is the Holocaust. Another one is the illness of *cancer*. Despite hardly being comparable in any other way, both disrupt and partly destroy families, whose members' individual fates are described in the novel. Both are 'forces' that influence humans collectively. The Holocaust, as has been

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56 For an extensive analysis of the Jewish mother stereotype see Joyce Antler's *You Never Call! You Never Write! – A History of the Jewish Mother*.

shown in chapter 2, has, to many, become a universal memory. Cancer, although not something man-made, takes on a similar role in society today as an illness looming over humans in many forms, without a definitive cure. The fact that people suffer without being able to influence these outside circumstances makes their suffering more tragic. Additionally, all Krauss' characters are so full of love for each other, as the title of her novel suggests, that it takes on an almost surreal air. They have to witness their loved ones' suffering, which is worse for them than their own suffering.

As the next two sub-chapters show, the aspect of family is an important one in the first generation plotline, as well as in the plotline concerned with the second and third generation. In the former, family plays its most important role with regard to traumatic memory of the Holocaust. In the latter, the aspect of family memory points toward diversity in contemporary Jewish American identity construction and religious pathways.

### 3.4.1 Traumatic Family Memory

Leopold Gursky lives separated from the woman he loves and from his son, who does not know his real father. Life as a family was never possible for them, as it was destroyed by the Holocaust before it could even begin to develop. The Nazis killed Leo's mother and brothers, destroying his family of origin. Both his family of origin and his potential future family are lost to Leo. Family memory, for him, is therefore almost always connected to the Holocaust, directly or indirectly. Family memory of the Holocaust is the most individual and personal kind of Holocaust memory. Through the character of Bruno, the text introduces a symbolic character who represents individual, as well as collective Holocaust memory. In Leo's personal family memory, in contrast, the text represents a much more private kind of Holocaust memory. Leo is a symbolic character, like Bruno. However, Leo symbolizes the separate private fates of individuals. His loss of his family and ensuing survival in the woods is representative of many survival stories. In *Holocaust Literature An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, Kremer gives a detailed survey of literary themes in Holocaust literature, in which "hiding" is a theme represented by 44 novelists as a predominant theme (1401, vol. II).

Leo's family memory is closely connected to a story of survival through hiding. It implies 'becoming invisible' for survival's sake, which explains his ardent will to 'be seen' in old age. It is him clarifying to himself and the world that he is "the opposite of disappearing", that he is a survivor set on being alive. He is finally 'appearing' in old age and wants to be seen. This is reminiscent of Lista in *Everything is Illuminated* wanting to be witnessed. Leo, however, is active about being seen, while Lista was only able to 'act out' (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*) her traumatic memory.

Leo keeps an index card in his wallet that says: "MY NAME IS LEO GURSKY *I HAVE NO FAMILY PLEASE CALL PINELAW CEMETERY I HAVE A PLOT IN THE JEWISH PART THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION*" (Krauss *History* 24/25, my italics). His statement shows that he defines his identity as Jewish and also that he is a very lonely person. All the people Leo has known or is related to are dead. This is doubly tragic, as it becomes clear he places importance on his Jewish identity. He chooses to be buried in the Jewish part of the cemetery. However, no one will be there to perform the proper burial rites for him and to mourn him. Traditionally and religiously motivated, these things are done by family members in Judaism. In no one being there to perform them for him, a tradition ends. What happens within a family in this case on a small scale, the ending of tradition, is always a threat to the cultural memory of a minority society. The loss of Jewish tradition through *assimilation* is a point addressed by Paul Zakrzewski in his compilation of third generation short stories, and others. The loss of Jewish memory through ending of family lines poses a similar threat, which explains the stress on offspring in Orthodox Jewish belief, for example.

For the major part of the novel readers assume that Bruno is alive and can take solace in the fact that Leo has a very close friend. Also, his son is alive, although he is oblivious of the existence of his real father. As the reader then discovers that Bruno is an imaginary friend and that Leo's son Isaac dies, all that remains are Leo's memories of people he knew. While he is performing the traditional Jewish mourning rite of *shiva* for his son, trying to remember people whom he knows who are still alive, Leo reaches the conclusion that there is no one: "I sat Shiva for Isaac, [...]. I decided to make a list of all the people I knew who were alive, in case I was forgetting someone. [...] My mind drew a blank" (Krauss *History* 122). He cannot name one single person; they are all dead, including Bruno.

Leo, however, is not a person who dwells on his loneliness, loss, and trauma. He is an example of someone who does his best to 'work through' his trauma, even during recurring catastrophes such as the early death of his son. His imagination helps him with this process: Sometimes, Leo has nice childhood memories. He triggers them actively by looking at a slide that shows his family's house:

A house with a yellow door at the edge of a field. It's the end of autumn. Between the black branches the sky is turning orange, then dark blue. Wood smoke rises from the chimney, and though the window I can almost see my mother leaning over a table. I run toward the house. I can feel the cold wind against my cheeks. I reach out my hand. And because my head is full of dreams, for a moment I believe I can open the door and go right through it. (Krauss *History* 34)



The passage is very descriptive so the reader may visualize this idyllic image. The importance of family homes (cf. Baudrillard) is addressed in detail later in the chapters on objects and their symbolic meaning in Krauss' novel *Great House*. Although it is a positive memory up to the point of opening the door, it becomes a tragic one, as the house of his childhood and the idyllic family situation are beyond his reach. This is true for every childhood—at one point it must end, and lives change. However, the memory Leo has of his family in Slonim in Poland is mostly traumatic, because of the way they died. Only his father died of natural causes; his mother and brothers were murdered by the Nazis. He is separated from his past not only by its inherent nature of being over (cf. Lowenthal), but also because it was ended violently.

*Re-memory*, the “static recurrence of traumatic images” (Morrison, in Assmann *Introduction*) happens to Leo through nightmares in which he sees his brothers bloodied and dead. Readers must assume his mother and siblings were all shot when Nazis invaded the village, as Leo recalls hearing “so many shots,” while he is hiding in the woods (Krauss *History* 8). “Sometimes I have nightmares,” says Leo (Krauss *History* 19). The readers know they are nightmares about the Holocaust although this is not explicitly said. This is deduced by filling in the narrative blanks left in the text, as discussed in chapter 3 (cf. Iser).

When he dreams a dream that is not a nightmare of his younger brother Josef, the grey of his eyes ‘reminds’ Leo of “the elephant I saw in the town square when [I] was his age” (Krauss *History* 19). This insistence on having seen something that others say was not there, is a sign of Leo’s vivid imagination, as discussed. It also symbolizes the Holocaust. The danger of the Nazis is symbolized by the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’, as the term is used to describe a problem that is overbearing, yet which people refuse to acknowledge. It can refer to existing anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s, in this context, for example. Interestingly, the episode about the elephant is immediately followed by a story about Bruno, which links Bruno to the elephant. Like the elephant, Bruno is not seen by others. Bruno is only *linked* to the elephant in a narratological way, not specifically *likened* to it, because Bruno is not a *problem*. The *problem* is the fact that Bruno is not there anymore, because he was killed by the Nazis. The several ways in which an elephant is evoked as a symbol may be unified by the proverbial saying: ‘elephants never forget’. The memory of elephants is praised as very long lasting. Leo imagining elephants and likening them to aspects reminding him of his family or of his heart-attack establishes his connection of lasting memory to these events.

Traumatic memory in the form of recurring nightmares and *mémoire involontaire* in the form of a flood of memories (cf. Proust, in Assmann *Introduction*), hit Leo many times in the novel. Finding out his son Isaac, with

whom he had no contact, has died, he goes to Isaac's house. He sits in the rocking chair on the porch:

I rocked a little, the way my father used to rock when he prayed. Once my father told me: When a Jew prays he is asking God a question that has no end. Darkness fell, rain fell. I never asked: What question? And now it's too late. Because I lost you, Tateh [Yiddish for father]. (Krauss *History* 168)

Leo's Father has died a natural, if premature death by heart-attack. Remembering the loss of his father, however, triggered by the rocking movement mimicking the movement during Jewish prayer, sets forth an avalanche of memory of Leo's family members who were killed. It culminates in a detailed account of all losses he has suffered. These losses include persons, and objects such as shoes important for his survival in the woods, and the house that was his family home (*ibid.*). The significance of objects for memory is discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Having lost his family, his parents, siblings and possibly other relatives and friends as a child is not the only loss in Leo's life. The chance of Leo starting a family of his own is destroyed by Alma leaving and the Nazis taking over. At that time it is not known to him or Alma that she is pregnant with his child. Leaving for America may have saved her and the child's life, yet it also makes it impossible for the three to live together as a family. It is mentioned almost casually that when Alma leaves on a boat for America, Leo "[...] continued to fill pages with her name" (Krauss *History* 8). He remembers her in writing, 'storing' his memory of her on paper because it cannot be lived out. The beginning of pogroms under the Nazis is stated only in vague terms. Violence is represented indirectly by the text: "After she [Alma] left, everything fell apart. No Jew was safe. There were rumors about unfathomable things, and because we couldn't fathom them we failed to believe them, until we had no choice and it was too late" (*ibid.*). Readers know the 'unfathomable things' mentioned mean that Jews were killed in very high numbers, in an industrialized manner. The text not saying this explicitly constitutes one of the narrative blanks in the sense of Iser, to be filled in by readers individually to create meaning.

Leo's thoughts of his family are tied in with traumatic memory not only of his family's death, but also of the traumatic time following it in which he had to focus on survival only. He remembers how he went into hiding, believing it would be only temporary: "The moment we heard their tanks approaching, my mother told me to hide in the woods. I wanted to take my younger brother, he was only thirteen, but she said she would take him herself. Why did I listen? Because it was easier?" (*ibid.*). The question of what one could have done to save others is a recurring trauma-symptom in survivor-sufferers. It speaks of survivor guilt that surviving Jews experienced

as part of their Holocaust trauma, when they were unable to save loved ones (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*). Leo, although a child himself at the time, still believes he could have saved his younger brother if he had not listened to his mother. It is doubttable he would have been able to care for his brother, confronted with basic survival, so the self-reproach he subjects himself to is brutal and futile

What follows Leo's thoughts about his brother is the memory of the pogrom in his village which he did not see but hear:

I ran out to the woods. I lay still on the ground." "Hours went by. And then the shots. So many shots. For some reason they didn't scream. Or maybe I just couldn't hear their screams. Afterwards, only silence. My body was numb [...]  
I never went back. When I got up again, I'd shed the only part of me that had ever thought I'd find words for even the smallest bit of life. (ibid.)

The numbness and loss of finding words for the experience are immediate signs of traumatization. Instead of feeling pain, the body shuts off emotions and feelings and does not even begin to search for a way of putting the experience into words. Instead, the traumatic event is barred from active memory for an indefinite period of time in self-protection because the experience is too massive to be coped with.

In parts of the narrative that present a more detailed view of some of his memories, Leo is shown to have nightmares about his father not recognizing him, about his teeth crumbling, about suffocating, and "I dreamed of my brothers, there was blood everywhere" (Krauss *History* 80). These nightmares are clear indicators of trauma common in survivor-sufferers (cf. Duggan). Again, the violent death of his brothers is only implied, not specified. What actually happened can easily be deduced, but is not named. The historical town of Slonim, as research shows, was the site of mass shootings by the Nazis. Similar to the Trochenbrod massacre fictionalized in Foer, Krauss' text draws upon historical facts, however is not set on detail and accuracy<sup>57</sup>.

The traumatic Holocaust experience changes Leo's outlook on everything in life. When his only son dies, he reflects on yet another catastrophic change in life, remembering the other changes: "The world no longer looked the same. You change and then you change again. You become a dog, a bird, a plant that always leans to the left" (Krauss *History* 80). 'Becoming' a dog refers to his time in hiding, when he had to eat raw animals to survive. Like a bird he 'flew' to America (journeying on a ship, however), finally lik-

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57 For extensive historical eye-witness accounts cf. Noach Kaplinsky, "The Slonim Ghetto—The Final Phase of Its Destruction" and others in: *Book of Kehilat Ostrolenka*, ed. Y. Ivri.

ening himself to the plant in his apartment which is old and withered, but not dead. He realizes that after coming to America and learning of his son, his son, instead of his love for Alma, became his reason to live: "Only now that my son was gone did I realize how much I had been living for him. When I woke up in the morning it was because he existed, and when I ordered food it was because he existed, and when I wrote my book it was because he existed to read it" (ibid.). Wanting his son to read his book symbolizes wanting to hand on his experiences and his art to the next generation. Tragically, this does not happen, because he loses Isaac a second time, this time to death. The necessity for a next generation, to be handed knowledge and experiences for the sake of remembrance becomes clear in this passage. For Leo, this transfer between generations cannot take place with his own son. Only at the end of the novel is a generational connection made, when he meets third generation member Alma Singer, who is familiar with his book and will remember and pass on his story. The readers of the novel take on importance in this case, as they are there to read the novel instead of Leo's son. Leo's memory is handed to the readers of his work, giving them significance in lieu of a family descendant. Writing thus substitutes handing on tradition within a family for Leo.

Leo's first loss of Isaac happens when he realizes Alma is married to someone else, and that he cannot play a role in his son's life. For the sake of Alma's family life, he does not impose himself on her husband and son to act out his right as a father. Instead, he withdraws and watches from the background as his son develops into a famous writer, only once going to a book-signing, not having the courage to reveal his identity to his son there. This brings to mind the Torah story of Abraham being asked by god to sacrifice his son Isaac to prove his love for god, called "The Binding of Isaac" [Akedát Yitzchák], or simply "The Binding" [HaAkedá] (Genesis 22: 1-19). Leo sacrifices *his* son Isaac in the sense that he is prepared to 'give him away', as Abraham is. He gives up his son, not for a god, but for Isaac's and Alma's happiness. The story is a key text in the book of Genesis. It is exemplary of Abraham's great love for and trust in god, and the sacrifice god is asking of Abraham is an ultimate sacrifice. Losing one's son and heir is a great catastrophe in Abrahamic society as described in the Torah. In the novel, this shows how much Leo is willing to give up for Alma's and Isaac's happiness. He knows he has no place in their family and would only disturb it. The (post)modern notion of a 'patchwork family' does not exist in his experience horizon.

One can say that Leo has lost his son to the Holocaust, as its consequences have obstructed their being able to become a family. Marianne Hirsch, in her essay on postmemory, notes that feminist Claire Kahane criticizes a certain trope in Holocaust representation in literature, in which "*maternal*

loss" and "mother-child separation" are used as textual mimesis of "trauma at its most fundamental," (my italics, Hirsch 124, paraphrasing Kahane 163). This trope is found in both of Foer's novels analyzed previously. Krauss breaks with this stereotype by representing Holocaust trauma through a *father* losing his son.

Memory of his past comes back to Leo when he buys a suit for his son's funeral. He thinks of Grodzenski, the tailor back in his village. He becomes embarrassed by what his new suit costs, how long it takes to be hemmed, and finally reaches the conclusion: "I knew I had made a fool of myself in that clown suit. A man should buy a suit for life, not death. Wasn't that what Grodzenski's ghost was trying to tell me? I couldn't embarrass Isaac and I couldn't make him proud. Because he didn't exist" (Krauss *History* 83). This statement reflects how Leo views people he remembers from his past, like Grodzenski, as ghosts. It also reflects how Judaism does not place much importance on belief in an afterlife (whereas in Christian tradition, all life on earth is supposed to be geared toward a life after death). For Leo, his son has ceased to exist. It is important, however, to observe proper mourning ritual in order to work through the loss of a loved person.

The Jewish tradition and religion asks for a mourning ritual which includes *shiva*, a seven-day mourning period for the family to get together, foremost meant for first degree relatives. Anyone wishing to mourn the deceased is welcome at a Jewish funeral, however. The family is not expected to feed the other mourners. Instead, the family is taken care of by friends and neighbors and is supported with food every day during shiva. At the funeral, the mourners' prayer, *kaddish*, has to be recited, and sometimes *kriah* is performed, the ritual tearing of clothes to express grief. Leo rips the collar of his new suit in a private demonstration of *kriah*. This rip symbolizes his pain at the loss. He "would have liked to shred the whole thing," but restrains himself (Krauss *History* 83). Leo mourns privately during the night before the official ceremony, in the tradition of his father and previous generations, drinking vodka, toasting life: "L'chaim" (Krauss *History* 84). He drinks, dances, sings, and cries all by himself, as the whole congregation and family would do together at shiva.

Fathers and sons are essential motifs in Krauss' *The History of Love*. Leo is a son and a father. This episode in his life shows him as both, remembering his son and also his father, Leo being the only one still alive. So while on the one hand this mentioning of past, present, and 'future' generations should signify the passing on of traditions from one generation to the next, in this particular case no one is there to 'receive' the tradition by Leo. With the death of his only child his line ends. This is why his work as an author takes on central significance. His novel, which will survive

him, is his child now, in a way. It contains what he wishes to pass on to following generations.

A father having to bury his only child is one way of suggesting what can happen if there is no one to pass on memory to. In the short story "Who Knows Kaddish" by third generation Jewish American writer Binnie Kirshenbaum (in Zakrzewski 171-182), the topic of passing on specifically Jewish rituals is approached from another direction, eventually leading up to the same question, however. In it, a secular Jewish family notices at the mother's funeral, that no one, neither father nor children, knows the words to the prayer said for the dead, anymore. They feel like they are betraying their dead mother, who placed importance on religious tradition. The discontinuation of the tradition leaves the family with a feeling of great loss not only for the deceased but for an aspect of their collective Jewish culture. This kind of loss is partly experienced by Leo, as well, as a continuation of his line on earth would have stood for the continuance of Jewish tradition. With no specific belief in a certain afterlife, and no descendant left on earth, Leo is at a point of absolute loneliness.

It is at the point of having lost his son that Leo notices that even Bruno 'is not there' anymore: "I thought: Bruno. Why hadn't he come?" (Krauss *History* 84). A possible and plausible explanation is the aspect that Leo is so tied up in memories of real people that he forgets to go to the length of convincing himself that his imaginary friend Bruno is there, as well. As with his son's death his last and strongest, if not only, reason to live is gone; he does not 'need' Bruno anymore. Leo regrets not having waited to buy his grave plot as he could have been buried next to his son. But it had not occurred to him that his son could die before him. He goes to his son's funeral without knowing anyone there except the half-brother. In order to be left alone and, on the other hand, to be accepted as family he speaks Yiddish, which no one understands. People assume he must be visiting from Slonim in Poland because in order to talk to Isaac's half-brother Bernard, Leo mentions the town's name (Krauss *History* 88).

Bernard recounts aspects his mother told him about Slomin, and Leo fills them in with individual memory in his mind. He remembers swimming in the river near his town with Alma, for example. Although he pretends to barely understand what anyone is saying, Leo is accepted into the mourning group of friends and relatives upon his utterances about Slonim and has some happy memories about his past in a circle of people who were friends with his son. This is the closest to a family gathering that Leo has ever had after his family was killed in Poland. He cannot bear it for long: "I knew I didn't belong here. I felt like a fool and an imposter. I stood by the window making myself invisible. I didn't think it would be so painful. And yet" (Krauss *History* 89). In him describing how he becomes invisible again,

Leo acts as if he is drawn into his trauma again. The state of invisibility is tied to his 'acting out' his trauma. This extreme situation brings it back. "To hear people talk about the son I'd only been able to imagine as if he were as familiar to them as a relative was almost too much to bear. So I slipped away" (ibid.). Leo removes himself from the situation because he is not able to deal with it. In a guest room, he suddenly sees a photograph with him and Alma in it. Bernard notices him seeing the photo: "*Isaac found this in her [Alma's] things after she died*, Bernard said. [...] *Don't know who he is. [...] It was inside an envelope with some letters. They were all in Yiddish. Isaac thought they were from someone she used to be in love with in Slonim*" (Krauss *History* 90, her italics). This way Leo finds out that Alma had kept his letters. The photograph is of particular importance of him, so he steals it. First of all it is the only picture of him and Alma together. Also, when it was taken, he suggested they pose like a married couple: "Maybe you should sit on a chair, and I'll stand above you, like they always do with husbands and wives" (ibid.). That is not how the picture is taken, eventually. However, it is a symbol of a life that *could have* happened, of a marriage that could have taken place. It is a picture commemorating the closest that Leo has gotten to having a family of his own.

### 3.4.2 Family Memory and Jewish Identity

The Singer family in Krauss' *The History of Love* consists of second generation parents Charlotte Singer, an English woman who married David singer, an Israeli, and their two (third generation) children, Alma and Emanuel Chaim, called Bird. They live in New York City in the USA, where David Singer works. The children were born in the U.S.A. and are therefore, by U.S. definition, Americans. The father's death by cancer nearly destroys the family. It leaves Charlotte Singer, the widow and mother, unable to go about her daily life, and leaves the children to fend for themselves at crucial ages. Both children find different coping mechanisms, both related to memory of their dead father. Alma, the 15-year-old daughter, is a teenager struggling not only with the loss of her father and her mother's unhappiness, but also with her first love and body issues. The impact of his father's death on nine-year-old Bird is shown in rather drastic personality changes.

All three remaining family members rely on the memory of David, the husband and father, and use it in different ways. Their family catastrophe has an impact on the nuclear family that seems to make normal life impossible. The memory of David Singer is similar to traumatic memory in the sense that thoughts of happier times with David re-emerge in a similar way that traumatic events re-emerge in memories of survivor-sufferers. Charlotte, Alma and Bird are traumatized by the loss of David. It is not only the

painful memories of his suffering and death but the happy memories that haunt Charlotte and Alma. Bird, however, is tormented by having *no* memories of his father at all.

Instead of eventually overcoming the loss, the family members have different coping mechanisms: Charlotte, David's wife, goes into denial. She withdraws from active life and lives only to mourn her dead husband. Instead of a mourning period with a strict time limit, her mourning is indefinite. She 'acts out' the memory of her husband's death instead of 'working through' it. Alma and Bird are in search of identification with their dead father. They focus on what he has taught them and can still teach them about life from beyond the grave. In a sense, therefore, their father resembles a ghost figure. Both Alma and Bird 'use' his memory first and foremost in order to define how they see themselves as Jews.

Comparing the Singers' loss to what Leo has suffered through the loss of his family to the Nazis and the loss of his own possible future family life to the circumstances of the Holocaust is not the aim of the novel. However, it shows that a traumatic event, like a death by cancer in the nuclear family, has repercussions on the individuals involved that are equally hard to overcome. It portrays an individual catastrophe that is a collective memory to everyone who has lost someone through cancer. It is not, however, *comparable* to the Holocaust because the aspect of evil that makes the Holocaust so distinct is the sheer numbers of people killed and the unprecedented, industrial killing of humans by other humans. Death by cancer is an 'impersonal' death, an evil without a perpetrator, as the illness cannot be anthropomorphized and seldom be blamed on someone else's malicious intent.

Krauss' text ties in a dominant Jewish American theme, Holocaust representation, with a plotline representing following generations, giving authentic descriptions of a family. In doing this the text shows a connection of residual and emergent, as well as dominant themes in Jewish American writing of the third generation. The residual Holocaust trauma is present in the text and new traumata are added in new settings, such as the family, realistically portrayed. A striking aspect of this plotline is the passivity of the second generation represented in the text. In the novels analyzed so far, the first and third generations take on particularly important roles in the plotlines, while the second generations are either skipped over or given less importance.

The ghost-from-the-past aspect of Leo's plotline is mirrored in this plotline in David's influence on his family. Charlotte still talks to her dead husband when she thinks her children are not around. Alma observes her talking to a picture of her husband she keeps in her study. Charlotte also sees David's resemblance in the children, especially in Alma. Alma is very aware of this and suffers from too much love given to her by her mother. She



feels smothered and at the same time suspects that her mother's love only culminates in her because of her resemblance to her father. The theme of the smothering Jewish mother, for example taken to extremely absurd turns in Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, and also in Shalom Auslander's representation of the mother in *Hope: A Tragedy*, is ignored by Krauss and replaced by a more realistic or authentic description of 'motherly love'.

David appears like a ghost in the memories of the children: Alma, at a loss to satisfy her younger brother's curiosity about ever more details about their father, starts to make things up about her father, with the only motivation of having startling little 'facts' to keep Bird happy. The invented memories serve the purpose of creating an image of a loving father in a son's mind who has no actual recollection of this father. Alma implants memories in Bird's mind. They are truly 'fake' memories, not even reconstructed ones of her own. Yet, they portray their father as a kind, loving man, which, as the readers deduce from the 'real' memory they are presented with by Alma and Charlotte, he was. Bird learns what was essential about his father, although the memory of him is made up by Alma. A fictitious, yet authentic father figure is thus (re-)constructed by Alma to fill Bird's 'empty' memory. This is not represented as something negative. It is done out of love for her younger brother by Alma and is greatly appreciated by Bird, who suffers because he has no memories of his father.

It is not too far-fetched, then, to interpret this aspect of Alma planting memories in Bird as mirroring the entire process of writing about the Holocaust without having experienced it oneself. The motivation in writing fiction about the Holocaust is its commemoration. Generations from the third onward cannot provide eye-witness knowledge themselves. They can, however, (re-)create fictitious memories in an authentic vain. In giving the Holocaust a representation as authentic as possible, drawing upon available resources, one recreates an image of a catastrophe, that through the known facts has found its place in collective Western memory. Giving this collective memory individual aspects, like individual victims' fates, be they real or fictitious, gives an empathic quality to collective memory. Herein lies the ongoing value of Holocaust fiction of later generations, not only of the ones directly affected. The empathy and commemoration factor is a major justifying factor for writing fiction about human suffering on the level of genocide.

While for Charlotte, life has been put to a complete halt by her husband's death, the children's lives are at developmental stages in which important identity formation processes take place. Krauss chooses to represent two directions in which Jewish life can develop in her depiction of the developments of Alma and Bird. Similar to the memory of the symbolic, ghost-like character Bruno being an inspiration to Leo, David, beyond his death, is an inspiration for his children. The imaginary Bruno helps Leo stay sane by

making him feel not so alone. David's children try to fill the position of their missing father by remembering him. This is not quite the same as imagining he were still alive, yet it takes on the same soothing qualities, as it gives them context and identity as humans on this earth. Their descent is fixed, they know, or imagine knowing, where they come from, *whom* they come from.

Father-child relationships are an aspect of the family that is greatly stressed in Krauss' novel *The History of Love*, as well as in the novels by Foer and Auslander discussed earlier in this work. I argue that these parent-child relationships stand in direct connection to the memory aspect of these novels. The constellation of father and son is a particularly important one in Krauss. Leo and his son Isaac and David Singer and his children Bird and Alma are both relationships in which the father does not have much active influence on his child/children. However, his existence alone is enough to influence the next generation. Either in values passed on to them deliberately and directly, as is the case with Alma and what she learns from her father about physical survival, or indirectly, as in Isaac's case, who becomes a writer, like his father, although his father is unknown to him, and who greatly admires his father's work *The History of Love* (Zvi 1+2), although he is not aware of the author being his father. He says, however, that someone read from the book to him and that he has never forgotten it (Krauss *History* 56). It is not revealed why this passage was so important to him, who read it to him, and in what language. Speculation could lead one to believe it was his mother, having kept some pages of one of Leo's original manuscripts, and maybe telling her son that this had been written by his father. Otherwise the importance Isaac Moritz places on this book is not to be explained. It would lead so far as to suggest that this experience has influenced him to become a writer himself. As is mentioned in his obituary (Krauss *History* 77-79), he published a book of stories called *Glass Houses*. As a chapter of Leo's *The History of Love* (Zvi 2) is called "The Age of Glass" (Krauss *History* 61); this establishes a vague connection between the literary works of father and son.

Passing on knowledge from one generation to another, exemplarily from a father to a son, is a symbolical act pervading many cultures. In discussing Jewish American fiction, the *Torah* comes to mind: In the fifth book of Moses, Deuteronomy 11:19, fathers are instructed to teach the word of god to their children. This is a modern translation, as in Hebrew there are two separate words for male and female child, and only male children are directly addressed by this passage of the *Torah*. In Orthodox Judaism, therefore, it is important that a father teaches his son the *Torah*, not necessarily his daughter. This is viewed differently by Reform Judaism, in which the term for male children is used in an inclusive way. Leo has not had any opportunity to pass anything on directly to his son. David has had time to pass on knowl-

edge to his daughter, who then takes on the role of passing memory of her father on to her brother.

It is interesting to note that while in the first generation plotline about Leo the father-son relationship plays a significant role, in the second/third generation plotline, a father-*daughter* relationship is represented. In the male authors' examples discussed, there are no strong female characters except for the ghosts. In Krauss' *The History of Love*, third generation member Alma Singer is a strong female character. Aspects in the plot like this one, or Krauss not taking up the Holocaust-stereotype of a mother losing her child but representing a father losing his child as consequence to the Holocaust, are signs pointing toward the author seeing and representing things from a different angle, breaking old stereotypes. In this way, Krauss can be seen as a third generation writer in the tradition of a Jewish American écriture feminine, of which, according to Stephen Wade (85), Grace Paley is an earlier representative, for example.

Despite the father figure's importance, the children are the more important symbolic family member characters of this plotline: Both children take certain memories or 'implanted' memories, in Bird's case, and turn them into examples of their own behavior, with regard to their religious, Jewish, and American identities. They have to become active in generating memory of their father. This is very similar to the aspects of Holocaust transmission deduced from the analyzed texts so far: The following generations cannot be passive and wait for knowledge and memory to be handed on to them. There is also an active role in demanding and asking about knowledge and memory transmission. This can be referred to a collective scale in Holocaust transmission and is exemplified on an individual level in the third generation plotline of Alma and Bird.

The children's names provide rich substance for interpretation. Alma Singer is named after the protagonist *Alma* in Zvi Litvinoff's plagiarized version of Leo Gursky's *The History of Love* (Zvi 1). The Alma in that book is named after Leo's love, Alma Mereminski. Alma Singer's mother chose this name for her daughter because she and her husband both loved the book. At some point in her quest to find out about her namesake Alma Mereminski, Alma Singer concludes (very much like Leo earlier with regard to his acquaintances): "[...] I found out that everyone I'm named after is dead. Alma Mereminski, my father David Singer, and my great-aunt Dora, who died in the Warsaw Ghetto, and for whom I was given my Hebrew name, Devorah" (Krauss *History* 176). *Alma* means 'nurturing' or 'kind-hearted' in Latin (adjective: *almus*, *alma*) and 'soul' in Spanish, which seems to stand in contrast to Alma Singer's preoccupation with physical rather than spiritual survival, as discussed in the following. Both translations of Alma match Alma Mereminski, however, or rather a description of Leo's love for her.

Alma Singer is not in favor of the tradition of re-using the names of dead family members for the following generations, which stresses her preoccupation with life, rather than death. Her way of mourning for and remembering her father is a much more positive one than her mother's and her brother's. Bird, on the other hand, bears Hebrew names, which he, surprisingly, relinquishes for the odd nickname Bird, although they represent his later religious affiliation in a far better way:

[My mother] named my brother Emanuel Chaim after the Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who buried milk cans filled with testimony in the Warsaw Ghetto, and the cellist Emanuel Feuermann, [...] and also the Jewish writer of genius Isaac Emmanuilovich Babel, and her uncle Chaim, who was a joker, a real clown, made everyone laugh like crazy, and who died by the Nazis. But my brother refused to answer to it. (Krauss *History* 35)

Neither child is fond of the nature of their given name, maybe because of the presence of death they see in them. Bird is called Bird after he tries to fly, jumping off a roof and breaking his arm. This is symbolic of him taking a 'leap of faith', trusting the Orthodox Jewish teachings of his school's janitor, Mr. Goldstein and taking them on as his belief system. His name's implication of being able to 'fly' may also be seen as a positive outlook on his further development. Although his sister and mother fear for his sanity and capability to cope with life, he may find strength for his further life in the religious practice he has adopted as a coping mechanism dealing with the loss of his father.

Both children keep certain objects that belonged to their father, and to both, books that used to be his play an important role in their memory of him and their identity formation. Charlotte, after David's death, cleans the house of any trace of his existence, which shocks the children. It seems a rather desperate gesture on her part, as the reader realizes she cannot manage to get over her husband's death and never leaves the mourning phase. Like a person acting out a trauma, Charlotte does not live in the present, but is caught in a 'timeless' phase of mourning (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*). After her mother throws all the things away, Alma takes her father's sweater out of the trash as a keepsake and wears it for as long as forty days in a row. This, incidentally, is the number of days it rains in Genesis during the great flood. The number has no religious significance for Alma. Tied to her father's memory, it gains traditional significance, however. As Bird is anticipating a second 'great flood', this aspect creates one of many connections between the siblings.

For her fourteenth birthday, Alma is given a book on paleontology by her mother, called *Life as We Didn't Know It*. It used to belong to her father, which makes it very special for her. Her mother explains the importance of

the book to her thus: "paleontologists study fossils in order to figure out the origin and evolution of life. Every fourteen-year-old should know something about where she comes from" (Krauss *History* 51). Alma reads it thoroughly, and it reflects a rather 'worldly' or secular attitude of her parents. Alma is additionally preoccupied with her father's stories of survival, for example training in the Negev (Krauss *History* 42). Her father was an Israeli soldier and known to his friends for his survival skills and love of the outdoors. When Alma is given a girlish sleeping bag for her birthday she asks to be allowed to swap it for a subzero temperature proof one that would make survival in extreme cold possible. She is also concerned with edible plants. Her uncle on her mother's side gifts her with a pocket knife that used to be her father's, which adds to the survival aspect she picks from her father's memory as the aspect to cultivate. She keeps a notebook called *How to Survive in the Wild*, in which she generates lists of things and writes about her daily life and problems as a teenager, like falling in love with a young Russian Jewish immigrant, Misha, her missing her father, and her fear about her brother and mother not being able to cope. She writes with a special NASA pen given to her by her father shortly before his death (Krauss *History* 94). 'The Wild' is her normal life; she feels that without (living) role models everyday life is hard and dangerous.

This striving for survival skills can stand metaphorically for the struggle of human life, and in this also for the struggle of the Jewish people for survival. Many people survived the Holocaust hidden in forests, having to fight cold and hunger. This is represented in Leo's brief accounts of his survival of the Holocaust, alone as a child in the woods (also cf. Kremer, 'Hiding' as literary theme in Holocaust writing). Transferred to the Israeli David Singer, the founding and 'survival' of the state of Israel are represented in this concept reminiscent of Jewish immigrants having to irrigate the land, grow edible plants, find drinking water etc. Tied in with the struggle for physical survival is the struggle and survival of Jewish memory.

With her sweater, sleeping bag, herbs and skills book, Alma strives to be like her father and prepares for survival in a world without him. She is an active, practical girl who takes her fate into her own hands. She identifies not by the many nationalities her mother recounts as parts of the family, but sees herself simply as an American. When her mother states: "you, for example, are one-quarter Russian, one-quarter Hungarian, one-quarter Polish, and one-quarter German" (Krauss *History* 97) an account of different nationalities of the grandparents, Bubbe and Zeyde (Yiddish for grandmother and grandfather), follows, as national borders moved, so Alma also could call herself Czech, or more quarters of one than the other. Alma strongly voices her opinion: "'I'M AMERICAN!' I shouted. My mother blinked. 'Suit yourself,' she said, and went to put the kettle on to boil" (ibid.).

Her mother, born in England, takes to the stereotypical English task of ‘putting the kettle on’, upset with Alma not taking up the ‘game of nationalities’. Alma does not take pride in the different nationalities of her ancestors and does not identify by them. As a teenager, her main concern is not to be different; she wants rather to be *the same* as her friends – American, or generally just *one* nationality, for example Russian, like her (boy)friend Misha.

As discussed, Alma’s name stands in opposition to her dealing with *physical* rather than spiritual survival. Her physical identity is stressed by her describing her teenage female body and her first (physical) encounters with Misha. Alma celebrates her bat-mitzvah at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem with her Israeli grandparents, who came to Palestine from Europe in 1938. Israel, the holiest Jewish place, the remains of the Second Temple, serve as the backdrop for her Jewish religious coming-of-age ceremony; yet, Alma says in the same paragraph that she is not religious at all. The ceremony is therefore rather an act of acknowledging Jewish identity with regard to tradition, but not religion:

The rabbi told me [Alma] that if I wanted I could write a note to God and add it to the cracks. I didn’t believe in God, so I wrote to my father instead: *Dear Dad, I’m writing this with the pen you gave me. Yesterday Bird asked if you could do the Heimlich and I told him yes. I also told him you could fly a hovercraft. By the way I found your tent in the basement. [...] Sometimes I set it up in the backyard and lie inside thinking about how you used to lie in it, too. I’m writing this but I know that you can’t read it. Love, Alma.* (Krauss *History* 98)

This passage Alma’s note to be stuck in the crack of the remaining part of the Wailing Wall best reflects her non-religious nature, her love for her father, and her attitude toward memory of him. She likes to imagine doing the same things he did and presents him as a hero to her younger brother who has no memory of him of his own. As she has no belief in god she also has no superstition about her father somehow being able to read her letter from some kind of afterlife. The letter is rather a reassurance to herself about her memory of her father and about her self-image.

Alma’s plotlines’ visual symbol at the chapter headings is a *compass*, representing her focus on outdoor survival skills and her search for direction. Identifying first and foremost as an American instead of choosing identification by diverse ancestral nationalities or by religious Judaism, she is a character symbolic of secular Jewish orientation in the United States. This is where her search of direction points her with regard to her memory of her father. Secular Judaism has many variations, as is reflected in the names of such organizations as the Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ) or the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations (CSJO). What they have in common,

according to Paul G. Shane is the promotion of the idea of “the *survival* and continuity of the Jewish people. Secular Jews are an integral part of the Jewish people and identify with its history and culture” (my italics). A certain support of the state of Israel is often part of secular Judaism. Shane refers to Theodor Herzl as the founder of modern secular Zionism as an important figure of influence on secular Jews and discusses intellectual and philosophical foundations for Secular Humanistic Judaism (ibid.).

Alma's memory of her father is connected with Israel: “What I remember, I remember in parts. His ears. The wrinkled skin on his elbows. The stories he used to tell me about his childhood in Israel” (Krauss *History* 37). Her father lived outside Israel, yet, identified as an Israeli, speaking to his children in Hebrew, for example: “He spoke to me in Hebrew, and I called him *Abba*<sup>58</sup>. I've forgotten almost everything, but sometimes words will come back to me, *kum-kum, shemesh, chol, yam, etz, neshika, motek*<sup>59</sup>, their meanings worn off like the faces of old coins” (ibid., Krauss' italics). Interestingly she remembers only terms of endearment and terms from nature, which bespeak of her father's love of nature and of his family.

Bird struggles with identity formation, as exemplified in his going through a phase of using different names:

When people asked him his name, he made something up. He went through fifteen or twenty names. For a month he referred to himself in the third person as Mr. Fruit. On his sixth birthday he took a running leap out of a second floor window and tried to fly. [...] from then on nobody called him anything but Bird. (Krauss *History* 35)

This represents a lack of orientation or identification, and a search process. The cause is the absence of any memory of his father, such as communicative memory (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*). At age nine and a half, Bird finds a religious book that used to belong to his father and is inscribed “to David Singer on the occasion of his bar-mitzva” (Krauss *History* 36). It is called *The Book of Jewish Thought*. Bird finding this book results in him taking the Jewish faith very seriously, although the family is not described as religious.

His secular family background is why he has little Jewish cultural memory (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*) in the form of Torah knowledge beyond some Hebrew schooling. Bird consequently takes on the school janitor Mr. Goldstein as a spiritual leader. Mr. Goldstein, an elderly Orthodox Eastern European immigrant, buries torn pieces of scripture, for example, as is done in Judaism, as they may carry the name of God, which is not al-

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58 Aramaic for an affectionate form of ‘father’, like ‘Dad’.

59 Hebrew nouns: kettle, sun, sand, sea, tree, kiss, sweetie.



lowed to be thrown away but must be buried like a person. This deeply impresses Bird. He starts writing God's name, or rather the Tetragrammaton JHVH, in Hebrew lettering, on all his school work, his diary, and on Alma's writing, as is discussed in the sub-chapter on writing and memory. His reason for doing this is that the documents marked thus may not be discarded. By becoming immersed in the Jewish faith, Bird believes he is closer to his father, although David is nowhere described as a religious man. *The Book of Jewish Thought* alone is enough to conjure a *false memory* in Bird's mind. He takes his religious beliefs to the level of orthodox belief, *davening*<sup>60</sup> outside every morning (Krauss *History* 37), hanging *mezzuzas*<sup>61</sup> (Krauss *History* 60) on the doors in the house. Wearing a *kippah*<sup>62</sup> (Krauss 2005:37), and eventually starting to believe he is one of the *lamed vovniks*<sup>63</sup> and finally, the *messiah* (English) or *moshiach* (Hebrew). He plans a trip to Israel as he believes the messiah has to appear there.

In addition to the spiritual survival aspect of taking on a religious identity, actual physical survival is also important to Bird. It is represented in him building an 'ark' to save his family from another flood of biblical proportions he is expecting. This ark is the visualized chapter heading symbol whenever the narrative turns to his point of view, which consists of entries from his diaries, all additionally inscribed with the Tetragrammaton. The ark and the Tetragrammaton stand for him believing to do god's work, as symbols of his faith. As mentioned earlier, Assmann points out the significance of the Ark as a 'memory container'. Building his ark is part of Bird's struggle for identity formation without memories of his father. Bird's life, like Alma's, revolves around survival. It starts out as a life about spiritual survival and goes on to physical survival of a biblical punishment, a second flood. Bird does not identify with the nationalities that his mother lists to his sister, either. When Alma yells that she is American, "Bird muttered: 'No, you're not. You're Jewish'" (Krauss *History* 97). While Alma, thus, with regard to Berel Lang's essay on 'hyphenated identity' or to what Aleida Assmann calls 'hybrid identities' (*Introduction*), would prefer the term Jewish American to describe her identity, Bird would certainly opt for American Jewish. This aptly reflects Kathryn Woodward's notion of "identity as interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations" (1).

60 Yiddish for 'praying'.

61 The word actually means 'doorpost' in Hebrew and describes a piece of Torah scripture, including the prayer 'Shma Yisrael', 'Hear, Israel', from Deuteronomy, to be hung on doorposts in houses.

62 Hebrew: head covering for men, worn at all times by Orthodox Jews, during prayer by conservative or reform Jews.

63 A composite made of the Hebrew letters *lamed* and *vav*, used in their numerical value as the numbers 30 and 6.



Mr. Goldstein, the elderly man whom Bird takes on as male spiritual role model and father figure, is probably a Holocaust survivor. It is pointed out, for example, that he cries when he sees snow. This is reminiscent of Holocaust survivors talking about ashes from the crematoria falling to the ground like snow. However, this is one of the narrative blanks in Krauss; it is never explicitly stated whether Mr. Goldstein is a survivor-sufferer. He is a Hassidic Jew, Hassidism being a branch of Haredi Judaism, which means he is extremely orthodox in his religious beliefs and practices. Hassidic Judaism contains aspects of mysticism such as the belief in thirty-six *lamed vovniks*, or *tzaddikim*<sup>64</sup>, thirty-six righteous men in every generation, one of which bears the potential of becoming the Messiah. The Hebrew vocabulary used in Bird's parts of the narration is exclusively religious, contrary to Alma's narration which contains worldly Hebrew terms.

Bird's tendency toward Haredi Judaism is not understood by his sister or mother. Although the children do visit Hebrew school and have their *bar-* and *bat-mitzvas*, their respective male and female religious coming-of-age ceremonies, the Singer family is otherwise not represented as religious. As *bat-mitzvahs* are a relatively young practice among Reform Jews, this exemplifies that the family, in their few religiously inspired celebrations, does not show a conservative tendency. Alma is rather embarrassed by Bird's religious behavior. The embarrassment does not result so much from the aspect of religiosity itself, but from the vehemence and suddenness with which it becomes apparent to her. Bird also misunderstands some of the Hassidic elements Mr. Goldstein talks about because he has no further source, model for practice, or explanation. He basically mimics Mr. Goldstein, only later starting to understand what a *tzaddik* would actually be supposed to behave like. His drift toward religiosity has a delusional aspect to it, as he takes to wetting the bed again, an outward indicator of severe psychological problems. He becomes an outsider at school and loses all his friends. His mother does recognize he needs help but is unable to provide it herself. He is sent to see a psychologist but is unable to confide in this stranger. Several of his actions prove that he is a distressed child rather than an enlightened savior, such as him placing holy items even at toilet doors, marking trivia with god's name, and piling up rubbish rather than actually building a floating device for his 'ark'. When he gives Alma a life jacket for her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, she begins to seriously worry about his mental state:

What if Bird's religiousness wasn't just a passing phase but a permanent state of fanaticism? My mother thought it was his way of dealing with losing Dad, and that one day he would grow out of it. But what if age only strengthened his beliefs, despite the proof against them? What if he never made any friends?

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64 Hebrew for 'righteous men'.

What if he became someone who wandered around the city in a dirty coat handing out life jackets, forced to deny the world because it was inconsistent with his dreams? (Krauss *History* 194)

This can be read as a rather harsh criticism of religious belief in general. After all, all religions rely on the belief in things that cannot be proven. However, Alma is not afraid for her brother because he is religious, generally, but because of the radical quality of his belief, which has cost him his friends already. She is afraid he will never fit in anywhere in life.

What the passage quoted above best illustrates is the passivity of the mother while her child is obviously having problems, and the worry this places on his older sister, who feels she must act as a replacement parent on his behalf. When their mother manages to at least work again after their father's death, she tells Alma: "From now on [...] I'm going to treat you like an adult," (Krauss *History* 43), to which Alma replies in her head: "I'm only eight, I wanted to say, but didn't" (ibid.). Alma, understanding her mother is incapable of living up to her responsibility, feels obligated to take on a quasi-parental role, and does her best to protect her brother, for example by answering the phone to his former friends who are looking to ridicule him, and by telling him to act normal. This is, however, too much responsibility for her. A mindful adult might have detected Bird's desperate need for help much earlier. Alma's trying to shield him by hiding his behavior from their mother neither helps Bird nor her mother in the end. Her role in Bird's strong identification with his father and thus indirectly his religious development, by 'feeding' him false memories, is not clear to her.

In Alma and Bird as symbolic family members, one can see symbolic representations of different Jewish identities in America today. On the one hand there is Alma, who constructs a secular Jewish American identity for herself, which is foremost American, as the order of the words suggests, as discussed in the introduction to this work. On the other hand, this is juxtaposed with Bird, who develops a religious Jewish identity that becomes more and more orthodox in faith and sees itself less as American but rather as Jewish first, in the Diaspora. Bird comes to identify himself as more and more American Jewish than as a Jewish American. His newly found faith is very strong, which is mirrored in the event that gave him his name Bird. He breaks his arm leaping off a building as he believes he can fly. His family does not suspect the reason for this but the reader can speculate that Bird at that point already believes god will grant him wishes or send angels to protect him.

As a symbolic family member character, Bird represents the growing numbers of Orthodox Jews in the United States. In the New York area, writes Josh Nathan-Kazis, the Jewish population is less liberal in 2012 than they were ten years ago: "More than half of the Jews in New York City live

in Orthodox or Russian-speaking homes, both of which lean heavily conservative,”<sup>65</sup>. He reports that the Orthodox population in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester has risen by over 100,000 people in the last decade (ibid.). According to him, “[T]he numbers point to a seismic shift in what it means to be a New York Jew as Manhattan’s Jewish population [traditionally liberal] shrinks and Brooklyn’s [traditionally conservative] explodes, and as people disaffiliate from the more liberal Jewish denominations”<sup>66</sup> (ibid.). It is not discussed whether people disaffiliating from more liberal denominations do this in order to join more conservative ones, or whether they generally turn to a completely secular lifestyle instead. Bird, in any case, is an example of someone drawn in by Orthodox teachings newly available to him through an Eastern European Jewish Orthodox immigrant, Mr. Goldstein. His presence appears to be filling a void of Jewish religious knowledge, and reflects the actual contemporary religious Jewish trend toward Orthodoxy in New York.

Bird and Alma are both lovingly concerned with each other’s and their mother’s well-being. Bird suspects that Alma has a different father than him and sets out to find this different father for her, going on an active quest. This leads to the outcome that Bird delivers the translation of Leo’s *History of Love* (Zvi 2) to Leo. Also, he arranges a meeting between Leo and his sister Alma, believing Leo to be her ‘real’ father. Thus, Bird is the source of connection between the first (Leo) and third (Alma Singer) generation. Although the meeting between Alma and Leo is very vague in its outcome, it is still a connection of generations. Leo, through Bird’s help, is able to meet in Alma someone who understands the connections of his manuscript and will carry this knowledge on into the next generation. In this way, Alma and Bird are both helpers on the way to catharsis for Leo, which he reaches just as his long and eventful life is coming to an end. Their efforts enable him to die at peace.

Many of the steps of Bird’s and Alma’s life show their maturing process and can be read as steps in the process of initiation, which, in Bird’s case sets on early and only through the early loss of his father. It is stated that Charlotte basically treats her children like adults, refusing responsibility for them anymore (Krauss *History* 43). Instead of Charlotte caring about

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65 Nathan-Kazis is quoting from a study conducted by the UJA-Federation of New York, at \$1.7 million spent on conducting and evaluating “6,000 telephone interviews with Jewish households”, it is “the largest of its kind undertaken in the United States”. The study is available online at the UJA Federation of New York’s website, URL: <http://www.ujafedny.org/jewish-community-study-of-new-york-2011/>.

66 “In the five boroughs of New York City itself, 40% of Jews currently identify as Orthodox” (Nathan-Kazis).

whether Alma has a boyfriend, it is the other way around; an important concern of Alma's is actively searching for a new partner for her mother, for example. Both Alma and Bird take to writing to reflect, and to activity to resolve their situation. In both, they are influenced by their father's memory. As symbolic characters, they represent how memory of a parent can influence the identity formation of children in completely different ways, in Alma representing a secular Jewish life-style and Bird representing an Orthodox Jewish orientation.

This chapter has given examples of objects tied to identity formation. In the following, the symbolism of *objects* is analyzed in Nicole Krauss' novel *Great House*, which provides the same main themes as *The History of Love*. The structure of the chapters follows the order of topicality of the symbolic characters established earlier, beginning with objects symbolizing Holocaust memory, leading to objects symbolizing writing and writers, to objects symbolically connected to the family.



## 4 Symbolic Objects and Memory

In correspondence with the chapter on symbolic *characters*, this chapter analyzes symbolic *objects* connected to memory in third generation Jewish American fiction. What is true for very specific objects, photographs, that is their ability to facilitate or function as what Landsberg and Lury call ‘prosthetic memory’, is equally true for other kinds of objects. They can serve as reminders of people, or of events, as ‘prosthetics’ to episodic memory. While objects can have a specific personal meaning to an individual, they can also symbolize something to a collective.

Objects are able to trigger memories through visual, haptic, or other sensual effects. Their *symbolic* power to trigger memory may be even greater. Cultures value objects for their materialistic but also for their symbolic implications. Religions especially place great (ideological) value on symbolic objects such as the cross in Christianity, the Mogen David, the star of David, in Judaism, or their respective holy books.

Symbolism is an aspect of fiction. Well known objects symbolic of Judaism such as the *menorah*, the candelabrum and its candles, the *shofar*, the ram’s horn, blown at festivities, or stones left at gravesites are briefly (re)introduced in this chapter. Nicole Krauss’ novel *Great House* serves as a model text for the analysis of objects represented in connection with memory. Its plotlines are all connected by one object in particular, which takes on different symbolic meaning in five different narrations. The characters in this novel are as complex and diverse as the ones in the novels analyzed previously. Nevertheless, the symbolic object, a desk, is the narrative focus of the novel. It connects the plotlines and creates narrative coherence which the characters alone do not accomplish. The desk’s symbolic implications with regard to memory in *Great House* pertain to the same three themes as the symbolic characters analyzed previously, the themes of (Holocaust) ghosts, writing and writers, and the family. These themes are represented by symbolic characters in *Great House*, as well. However, the desk’s symbolism is superordinate to the characters, as the following analysis shows.

In *The System of Objects*<sup>67</sup>, Jean Baudrillard asks: “How is the ‘language’ of objects ‘spoken?’” (8). This chapter analyzes objects in fiction with the help of Aleida Assmann’s and Jean Baudrillard’s theses with regard to memory research and object theory. “The primary function of furniture and objects here is to personify human relationships,” says Baudrillard about objects in family homes in particular (14). This is expounded upon in the chapter on symbolic objects and the family. He continues: “Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects

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67 Original title: *Le Système des Objets*. Editions Gallimard, 1968.

take on a certain density, an emotional value – what might be called a ‘presence’” (ibid.). This holds true for the text analyzed. The presence of objects and the collusion, or secret accord, between humans and objects, in *Great House*, lies in the symbolic meaning an object holds for individual characters in the novel.

## 4.1 Symbolic Objects and Memory in Krauss’ *Great House*

While objects take on important, yet secondary roles in the novels discussed thus far, Nicole Krauss’ third novel, *Great House*, places an object at its narrative center. This object, a desk, evokes and connects different memories and carries various symbolical meanings. It is a symbolic object connecting the four general plotlines. All of the five different narrators appear to be making ‘confessions’ about their lives. The novel is narrated in a non-chronological way, alternating the points of view, and separated into parts I and II.

The novels analyzed so far in this work are novels of character, the characters bearing symbolic value. As their titles represent, they all deal with abstract concepts in connection with memory and the symbolic characters discussed: The title of Foer’s *Everything is Illuminated* is about gaining clarity of historic Holocaust events, his *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* refers to the sound and proximity of the September 11 New York terrorist attacks in 2001 and describes the immediacy of trauma events for survivor-sufferers. Auslander’s *Hope: A Tragedy* is concerned with one man’s inability of coming to terms with the Holocaust, dealing more with the opposite of hope, the loss of all hope. Krauss’ *The History of Love* deals with the emotion of love in various forms, romantic love, familial love, and love of writing. Her *Great House*, in contrast, bears an object in its title. It is a direct reference to the school of Jewish learning founded by Yochanan ben Zakkai, the Great House of Yavne, and also, metaphorically, to the mind as the house of memory, as the text itself suggests in paratextual (cf. Pfister/Genette) references to Sigmund Freud.

In this chapter, *Great House* is not analyzed in a chronological way or simply pertaining to its characters, but with regard to its major symbolic object, the desk. Minor symbolic objects represented in the novel are discussed with regard to the different themes, as well. In order to unravel the complex plotlines, the following summary gives a chronology of the desk’s owners and locations throughout the novel. The five first person narrators, in the order of their appearance, are Nadia, Aaron, Arthur Bender, Isabel,

and George Weisz. Each narration is a first person monologue in the form of a confession.

The desk starts out in Hungary, belonging to George Weisz' father, a historian, who died on a death March to Germany. It is taken away by either plundering Germans or neighbors after the Weiszes are deported. George Weisz immigrates to Palestine and spends his life 'finding' furniture of Jews that was stolen by Nazis. He searches for his own family's furniture, too, especially the desk. This plotline is told in the chapters "Lies Told by Children" in part I, narrated by Isabel (no last name given), and "Weisz" in part II of the novel, narrated by George Weisz.

The next person in possession of the desk is an undisclosed person in England, near London, who gives it to a young Jewish German refugee, Lotte Berg, around the year 1948. Lotte becomes an author and keeps the desk for many years. She gives it to Daniel Varsky in 1970. He is a young Chilean poet who reminds her of her own child that she gave away. This plotline is told in the chapters "Swimming Holes" in parts I and II of the novel, narrated by Arthur Bender, Lotte's husband. Daniel Varsky moves to the U.S., to New York City. When he decides to go back to Chile in 1972, he leaves the desk and all his other furniture with Nadia, a writer, whom he knows through a mutual friend. Nadia's story is told by herself in the chapters "All Rise" in part I and II of the novel.

Nadia becomes the author of several novels. They are all written at the desk which she owns for many years. Daniel Varsky 'disappears' at the hands of the Chilean Pinochet regime. It is later found out that he was tortured and killed, like many others. One day, a woman claiming to be Daniel Varsky's daughter comes and asks Nadia for the desk. She supposedly takes it to Jerusalem. It is truly George Weisz' daughter, Leah, who puts the desk in storage in New York so that her father cannot get it. Leah's and her brother Yoav's story are told in the chapter "Lies Told by Children", narrated by Isabel, Yoav's girlfriend.

In 1999, Nadia travels to Jerusalem in search of the desk. She cannot find it, as it is not there. But she asks for it at George Weisz' house, which makes him realize that his daughter Leah has kept the desk in New York. George Weisz, who has spent his whole life re-assembling his father's study, lacking only the desk, goes to New York and bribes people to be allowed to sit at his father's desk for an hour. He then commits suicide. The desk never reaches Israel. It stays in a storage house in New York City, in a Diaspora. It brings Nadia to Israel, however, and in a car accident connects her to the country and to Dov, the person whom she injures accidentally. He has come back to Israel from London to make peace with his father and to try to commit suicide. Dov's story is narrated from his father Aaron's (no last name given) point of view in the chapters "True Kindness" part I and II. Six years after



their father's suicide, Leah contacts Isabel and asks her to help her brother Yoav lead a normal life, which she does. The desk is not mentioned again.

## 4.2 The Desk as an Object Symbolic of the Holocaust

For several characters in *Great House*, the desk is a reminder of people who are gone. It is an object that has survived its previous owners and that bears their memory for its present owners, representing a burden to some. Partly, memory of people it stands for symbolically is Holocaust memory, for example. The symbolic power of objects is gradually enforced throughout the separate plotlines. The desk is the object tying all plotlines together and, in its (symbolic) value for the narration, it is eventually more important than the characters represented. The desk functions as a symbolic object tied to and representing ghost-like characters in three of the four plotlines of *Great House*, in "All Rise", "Swimming Holes", and "Weisz". In two cases, the ghost-figures connected to the desk are Holocaust ghost characters similar to the ones analyzed in the chapters on character symbols. These two cases are analyzed in detail.

The importance of objects in Holocaust memory has been discussed earlier, as some of the ghost characters analyzed are hoarders of objects. The collected objects function as reminders in order to commemorate persons, individuals who are gone and whose belongings are the only things that remain of them. Eye-witness survivors die at some point, and the objects they leave have a longer 'durability' than humans. This explains the important role of objects in memory in general, and in Holocaust memory in particular. The objects are reminders of the humans they once belonged to. It also explains the cultural importance of museums as storage places of important memory objects.

Lagodinsky<sup>68</sup> and Kindler<sup>69</sup> state in "Erinnerung – Mehr als ein Ritual" ("Memory – More than a Ritual"), an essay published online on May 8, the annual commemoration day of Allied victory over Nazi-Germany: "Progressing time alone is reason enough not to make working with memory dependent on encounters with eye-witnesses. [...] We need to focus increasingly on moving on to working with witness-witnesses<sup>70</sup>" (2014, my translation).

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68 Sergey Lagodinsky, representative of the Jewish Congregation of Berlin, 2008-2012.

69 Sven-Christian Kindler, member of the German Bundestag for the Green Party as of 2009, vice president of the German-Israeli Society as of 2012.

70 Original text: "Allein schon aufgrund der fortschreitenden Zeit dürfen wir die Erinnerungsarbeit nicht von Begegnungen mit Zeitzeug\*innen [sic!] abhän-

This quote refers to *humans* who have witnessed witnesses. Lagodinsky and Kindler stress the importance of the second and third generations as witness-witnesses (ibid.). The concept is transferable to *objects* having ‘witnessed’ witnesses, having accompanied them as personal belongings of minor or major importance. While objects cannot replace human memory, they can certainly support it in being material proof of the existence of humans. If there is an object, someone made it, and it belonged to someone.

Aleida Assman mentions objects and their storage in her chapter on ‘memory boxes’, (in *Cultural Memory* 101-118) as discussed in this work with regard to objects symbolic ghost characters keep, for example. Assmann does not focus on the content of these memory boxes, but rather on the boxes’ storage function for memory. The importance of objects themselves is discussed by Assmann in her depiction of late 20<sup>th</sup> century art projects connected to memory. In her chapter on art commemorating the Holocaust (in *Cultural Memory* 358-368), the “Missing House” project by Christian Boltanski is mentioned, as discussed earlier. An object symbolical in its absence, the “Missing House” is interesting in reference to the title of the novel *Great House*, as the great house of Yavne, to which the novel’s title refers, is a ‘replacement’ of the Temple in Jerusalem, a house that is also ‘missing’.

Assmann also presents a project focused on photographs of objects (in *Cultural Memory* 365-368). Naomi Tereza Salmon’s photographic cycle with the German title “Asservate”, that is ‘court exhibits’, is a collection of objects, “relics connected with the holocaust,” she photographed for Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. These relics are personal items like glasses, or false teeth, for example. They are not to be confused with the Nazis meticulously keeping personal objects taken from Jews at concentration camps<sup>71</sup>. Those are usually exhibited at the camps, in the specific places where they gained their symbolic meaning. “The assignment was not to produce art photos and was not directly aimed at remembrance,” writes Salmon, “I was supposed to produce a documentary portrait of objects to assist in keeping records and archives. The objects themselves were mostly fragments veiled in silence”<sup>72</sup>. She states that it was unclear in most cases, as

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gig machen. [...] Wir müssen verstärkt dazu übergehen, mit Zeugen-Zeugen zu arbeiten.”

71 Assmann relates a story of an Auschwitz visitor, encountering a room entirely filled with shoes, bluntly ‘warning’ others of the ‘boring’ content of the room: “Don’t bother to go in there, [...]. There’s nothing but shoes in there” (*Cultural Memory* 365). The ‘story’ behind these objects, the fact that each pair of shoes stands for a murdered person, is, in its totality, too much to comprehend for some visitors.

72 Cf. [www.naomiterezasalmon.net/projects/asservate.html](http://www.naomiterezasalmon.net/projects/asservate.html) for images from the exhibit catalogue and Salmon’s statement.

to who had collected, kept, and brought in these relics. "But during the routine process of being photographed the objects began to speak. They stood for people who had been deprived of their humanity, of the right to life, and of the right to awaken memories," recounts the artist. In this statement, Salmon answers Baudrillard's question as to how objects 'speak': she discovers their symbolic meaning without even knowing the objects' full stories. This is reminiscent of the objects collected by symbolic Holocaust ghost characters. They 'speak', so to say, by triggering questions about their former owners and manufacturers, their collectors, or their thieves.

In their eye-witness accounts, Holocaust survivors mention objects that were of importance to their survival, and objects they lost. Both can take on symbolic meaning with regard to memory. Renate Lasker-Harpprecht, an Auschwitz survivor, when asked whether her parents had felt the urge to flee after *Kristallnacht*<sup>73</sup>, says her father had investigated passage to Palestine, then decided to try for Italy. She explicitly remembers their furniture having been sent off, a definite step toward emigration: "And it would have almost worked out! We had even sent off our furniture already in a huge container. It never reappeared<sup>74</sup>" (my translation, Lasker-Harpprecht, interviewed by DiLorenzo 11). She and her two sisters survived, her younger sister and she having been sent first to prison, then Auschwitz, then Bergen-Belsen (ibid.). Lasker-Harpprecht's parents were deported and murdered in 1942 (ibid.). The side mention of the furniture never reappearing takes on a symbolic meaning in the instant one knows her parents also 'never reappeared'. The pain of the loss of loved family members cannot be matched by the loss of objects. Once a connection is established between humans and objects, however, objects can create strong symbols of loss.

The stories objects can tell are worth preserving, and objects can take on a general symbolic value, which makes them valuable material to be used in Holocaust fiction, as well. Symbolic objects can mediate between historical witnessing and fictional witnessing, connecting the two through their symbolism. The following examples represent fictional objects symbolic of the Holocaust, with a focus on furniture, in particular, a desk.

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73 The nights of pogroms against Jews all over Germany, November 9-10, 1938.

74 Original text: "Mein Vater hat versucht, uns nach Italien zu bringen. [...] Und es hätte beinahe geklappt! Wir hatten sogar schon unsere Möbel mit einem riesigen Container losgeschickt. Die sind nie wieder aufgetaucht."

### 4.2.1 Symbolic Objects and Silence – Suppressed Holocaust Trauma

In the narration “Swimming Holes” I and II, an elderly professor of English at Oxford, Arthur Bender, recounts his and his wife’s life together in London, in the form of a life’s confession. His wife, Lotte Berg, is Jewish and escaped from Germany on a *Kindertransport* to England. Her family, brothers, sister, and parents, was left behind and died in the Holocaust, the exact circumstances of which are not specified. She displays signs of trauma, such as never talking about her past, screaming in her sleep, and is living her life as a recluse, adhering to a set of strict rules. In this, she is a symbolic ghost character. Lotte is a writer and her work space belongs only to her and the giant desk in it. This desk, Arthur assumes, was given to her by a previous lover. To him, the desk is a symbolic object of this lover and Lotte’s supposed attachment to it makes him jealous. This jealousy, however, is not addressed by him. He knows that Lotte would not accept inquiries into her life with regard to her past.

The title of this narrative strand refers to a ritual of Lotte’s: Every day, even in winter, she walks to a nearby natural pond, a swimming hole, and completely immerses herself in the water. Her husband accompanies her but only watches. For him, the experience bears a certain kind of horror: “And then, in a flash, she’d disappear into the blackness. There would be a small splash, or the sound of splash, followed by silence. How terrible those seconds were, and how they seemed to last forever! As if she would never come up again” (Krauss *Great House* 77). The bath is something inaccessible for Arthur; he feels separated from Lotte while she is immersed. It is a moment in which he imagines she might never reappear and that makes clear to him how little he knows about her.

The ritualistic nature of the immersion lies in its daily routine, on the one hand. Arthur states: “Our lives ran like clockwork, you see. Every morning we walked on the Heath. [...] I accompanied Lotte to the swimming hole” (ibid.). It is, on the other hand, reminiscent of Christian baptism and Jewish *mikveh* rituals. While in Christianity, baptism is an initiation rite, mostly performed on babies and only full immersion for adult baptism, in Judaism, full immersion in a *mikveh* bath is needed in case of conversion to Judaism, and for women every month after the time of their period before marital sexual intercourse<sup>75</sup>. It is a ritual and metaphorical cleaning, and constitutes and strengthens a bond with god. The *mikveh* bath rituals are observed mostly by Orthodox Jews. In Conservative and Reform Judaism,

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75 Taking place for the first time one or two days before marriage, cf. Seth Kunin, ed., *Themes and Issues in Judaism*, p. 70 ff. “The Wedding Ceremony”.

not much importance used to be placed on them. However, they are experiencing a revival (cf. Allison Hoffman). Lotte displays no signs of being a religious person apart from taking these ritualistic baths every morning. The plural of the title, *Swimming Holes*, is symbolic of the times when Lotte withdraws from the present, and immerses herself fully in her past, a time at which she is utterly inaccessible to Arthur, just like the moments when she is under water.

As Arthur's narration progresses, the readers, along with Arthur, find out more about Lotte's past and realize that her daily bath is a form of self-cleansing or atonement for having committed what she herself calls a "crime": she has given away her child. Arthur finds this out only at an advanced stage of her Alzheimer's, when she wanders off to the town hall and announces "I've come to report a crime, [...]. I gave up my child, [...]. On July 20, 1948, five weeks after he was born" (Krauss *Great House* 101/102). Arthur has regretted their not having children and it strikes him as particularly cold-blooded and heartless of Lotte to give a child away and never to tell him about it. This was long before they were a couple, and is connected to her not being able to care for a child, due to her Holocaust trauma. The degree to which she is traumatized, however, never becomes quite clear to Arthur, although he knows about her "abysmal loss," as he calls it, "the loss of her former world," (Krauss *Great House* 245), and the "atrocious conditions" (Krauss *Great House* 79) under which she suffered. Also, he is aware of the fact that "she struggled with her sadness" all through her life (Krauss *Great House* 80). The degree of this suffering and sadness, however, cannot be fully accessible to him.

Arthur has felt "a pang of regret, for the child we'd never had" before, when the young poet Daniel Varsky comes to visit Lotte in 1970 (Krauss *Great House* 81). He realizes that if they had had a child early on in their marriage, it could be Varsky's age. Along with the regrets of not having had a child, Arthur remembers how he met Lotte in 1949 and mentions her desk in connection with her. He describes how in her little room "it overshadowed everything else, like some sort of grotesque, threatening monster, [...] bullying the other pathetic bits of furniture" (Krauss *Great House* 83). He likens it to the desk of a "medieval sorcerer" and is frustrated at finding its "drawers of totally impractical sizes" empty (ibid.). The fact that there is nothing in the drawers, to him, makes "the specter of that enormous desk, really more like a ship than a desk, a ship riding a pitch-black sea in the dead of a moonless night with no hope of land in any direction, seem even more unnerving" (ibid.). This description is reminiscent of an ark in the biblical sense, at the moment, when the flood is raging and the remaining humans may be thinking their god has forsaken them. Unlike an ark, however, the desk contains nothing to preserve, rendering it useless and bizarre.

Arthur also recalls how he first saw it, when Lotte opened the door to her apartment, “hovering behind her, threatening to swallow her up, [...] that tremendous body of furniture” (ibid.). His thoughts about the desk build up an image of a scary object with an obscure power to it. Thus, in presenting the desk as a threat to Lotte in Arthur’s perception, the text makes it an object symbolic of her past and all the things Arthur does not know about her. It becomes symbolic, on a greater scale, of the Holocaust, of its traumatic nature, and of the inability to know it. The facts that Arthur is not an eye-witness, that his eye-witness wife hardly tells him anything about her Holocaust past, and that the past is not fully knowable in any case (cf. Lowenthal) all contribute to Arthur’s projecting vague notions of past horror onto the desk. The desk is an object witness to parts of Lotte’s life, but it does not reveal this past.

Arthur describes how Lotte and he “lived in its [the desk’s] shadow. As if she had been lent to me from out of its darkness, [...] to which she would always belong” (Krauss *Great House* 278). As stated above, the desk is only an object symbolic of what they *truly* lived in the shadow of: the Holocaust. Lotte’s traumatic experiences and her and Arthur’s way of dealing with them have steered their whole life together. Opting for ‘acting out’ instead of ‘working through’ has, on the one hand, helped them to lead a nearly normal life. On the other hand, this life was only ‘normal’ on the surface. The deep insecurities and the true distance between them are consequences of their choice. The true extent of the implied horror beneath their silence becomes clear when Arthur equates the desk to death: “As if death itself were living in that tiny room with us, threatening to crush us, [...]. Death that invaded every corner, and left so little room” (ibid.). The omnipresent danger of being ‘crushed by death’, in the logic of the text, can only be avoided by not addressing it, in Arthur’s and Lotte’s opinion. This danger being attached to Lotte’s Holocaust past, memory and discussion of the past are a taboo in their relationship.

When Arthur asks Lotte how she obtained the desk, all she reveals is that it was a gift. She gives him “a look equivalent to the raising of a wall,” (ibid.) prohibiting further questions. Arthur assumes the giver was a former lover, and after he learns that Lotte had a child he is sure the desk used to belong to its father. The vocabulary used shows Arthur’s severe dislike of the desk. Words and connotations used with regard to the desk by him are mostly negative. He views the desk as “masculine” (ibid.) and admits an “inexplicable jealousy” of it (Krauss *Great House* 84). As he believes it was a gift from a former lover, he believes that that lover must have been “the most serious of all, [...] because he alone had been allowed to leave behind a trace” (Krauss *Great House* 247). He says about Lotte’s general relation to possessions that “[t]he few things she lived among were entirely practical, and

held no sentimental value to her" (Krauss *Great House* 248). The desk, however, to him, is an exception. After Lotte's death, he confesses to a friend that often he made "no distinction in [his] mind between him [referring to her former lover] and the desk" (Krauss *Great House* 249). To make his friend understand, he describes the desk as

an enormous, foreboding thing that bore down on the occupants of a room it inhabited, pretending to be inanimate, but, like a Venus flytrap, ready to pounce on them and digest them via one of its many little terrible drawers. [...] Once I dreamed that I opened one of the drawers to find that it held a festering mummy. (Krauss *Great House* 248)

He remembers how he hoped that she would leave the desk behind when they married and moved in together, but she keeps it. When they move it into the new house, he describes it in Poe-like terms of gothic horror:

By [...] some miracle or nightmare, depending on the perspective, the movers managed to negotiate the narrow corridors and staircases of the house, groaning with pain and shouting obscenities that [...] were carried through the open window of the room where I sat, waiting in horror, until at last I heard a pounding at the door, and there it was, resting on the landing, its dark, almost ebony, wood gleaming with a vengeance. (Krauss *Great House* 86)

As in descriptions before, the desk is anthropomorphized in this passage. It appears as if it had knocked on the narrator's door itself to re-announce, with malice, its presence in his life. In their first living arrangement together, Arthur refers to the desk as an object existing "in the shadows of the room" they sleep in, where it appears to him to be "waiting like a Trojan horse" (ibid.). He is aware that the desk, having been with Lotte longer than him, 'knows' more things about her than him, and that this knowledge, if revealed, might be hurtful to him. One of these hidden, hurtful secrets, revealed eventually, is the one of Lotte having had a child.

When Lotte and Arthur buy their own house, the attic becomes Lotte's study and Arthur is "relieved to think that the desk would be relegated to the attic, away from the rest of the house" (Krauss *Great House* 87). Like the real life Anne Frank's and fictitious Anne Frank's life in Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy*, the (writing) life of Lotte is solitary and isolated. The desk and all that it symbolizes, once removed from Arthur's sight, becomes less of a threat to him and easier to ignore or even forget sometimes. He knows, however, that it is still there.

The desk being kept in the attic symbolizes the (unhealthy) suppression of trauma. Lotte is not an overt 'madwoman', as Bertha in *Jane Eyre* (cf. Gilbert/Gubar), she does not dwell in the attic, yet her occasional withdrawal

from all human contact bears something pathological. "I avoided the attic," says Arthur. "Not because of the desk, of course, but out of respect for her work and her privacy, without which she wouldn't have survived. She needed a place to escape, even from me" (ibid.). As much as Lotte's need for privacy may be the reason for her occasional withdrawal to the attic, Arthur is too eager in stressing that he is not trying to avoid the desk. Quite the opposite, from what he has revealed to the readers, avoiding the desk is most likely his main reason for leaving Lotte alone in her room.

Arthur chooses to ignore the desk's presence as best he can. This mirrors his ignoring the way the couple chooses to ignore, or suppress, Lotte's trauma. Arthur states that he "made a pact of ignorance and smothered what churned within so that things might carry on as they always had, [...]. So that we would not be invaded, crushed, or overcome by what dwelled in the silences around which we had so delicately, so ingeniously built a life" (Krauss *Great House* 281). He is referring to Lotte's traumatic experiences in the Holocaust and his never asking about them, being afraid that addressing the issue of trauma would lead to an irreversible breakdown of Lotte and of their relationship. The negative memory is too strong and overbearing for her to be able to openly address it herself. Her choice of suppression is respected and collaborated in by Arthur. It may not be the best choice from a psychological point of view. However, as every trauma is different, and every survivor-sufferer must find their own coping mechanism, the text reveals that to some, 'working through' their trauma is not a possible option. In this, the text represents in realistic terms the situation of many survivors choosing silence for their own sake. Not everyone feels compelled to discuss their trauma or finds strength in dealing with it openly.

After getting to know him better, Lotte gives the desk to the young poet Daniel Varsky, who takes it to New York. She does not inform Arthur of this gift: "It was months before I [Arthur] realized that she had given him her desk, [...]. I gave it away, she said. Gave it away? I said, unbelieving. To Daniel, she said. He admired it, and so I gave it to him" (Krauss *Great House* 97/98). This giving the desk away stands in stark contrast to how Arthur had hitherto perceived her connection to the desk. He, thinking it reminded her of a former lover, thought it was too important to her to part with. Lotte parting with the desk makes him recall the situation in her life when she had to 'give up' *people*, her parents:

She was the only child with her parents when the SS rung their bell that October night of 1938 and rounded them up with the other Polish Jews. [...] For a year she clung to her elderly parents and they to her inside the sealed compartment of that rapidly moving nightmare. (Krauss *Great House* 98)



The train compartment metaphor in this passage is reminiscent of the sealed trains deporting Jews to concentration camps. This is what happens to Lotte's family. Lotte does eventually part with her parents. She has to leave them behind when she gets a chaperone visa for a *Kindertransport* to England, which saves her life. This terrible choice leaves her with survivor guilt, however:

Of course it would have been unimaginable not to take it [the visa] and go. But it must have been equally unimaginable to leave her parents. I don't think Lotte ever forgave herself for it. I always believed it was her only real regret in life, but a regret of such vast proportions that it couldn't be dealt with straight on. (Krauss *Great House* 99)

In glimpses like this Arthur reveals that he does understand her extreme loss to some extent, but like her, he cannot confront it directly. They both chose a life of not discussing these most important experiences in Lotte's life. For almost their entire life together, Arthur thinks that leaving her parents is her only loss: "The loss was so extreme there seemed no need to go looking any further. So how was I to know that lost inside the vortex of her was also a child?" (ibid.). He learns that leaving or giving up her child must have been equally hard for her, as it becomes one of the only memories she keeps when she has advanced Alzheimer's.

His wife losing her memories is a process that Arthur experiences as very painful: "I could see in her eyes that beneath those words there was nothing, just an abyss, like the black-water pond she disappeared into every morning" (ibid.). Likening Lotte's memory to the abysmal swimming hole she enters every day, Arthur asserts that he is losing the ability to communicate with Lotte more and more, due to her Alzheimer's. While she 'emerges' sometimes, displaying signs of knowing who and where she is, the periods of 'immersion' become longer. He sees her losing her memory as a kind of forestalled death, "like a person slowly bleeding to death, hemorrhaging toward oblivion" (ibid.). When she does not realize herself what is going on with her anymore, in Arthur's words, "she set off alone, utterly alone, on a long journey back to the shore of her childhood. Her conversation [...] disintegrated, leaving behind only the rubble out of which a once beautiful thing had been built" (ibid.). What Arthur accurately describes is the disintegration of personality leading to a total loss of identity in advanced Alzheimer's patients. The text stresses the importance of communication for social life, but its main point is the loss of identity that comes with loss of memory.

Arthur finds documentation of the child, a boy called Edward, and a strand of his hair, and after Lotte's death, he discovers the woman who adopted the child. She tells him about the advertisement she found in a paper:

"Baby boy of three weeks available for immediate adoption" (Krauss *Great House* 263). For Arthur, it is incomprehensible how anyone, let alone the person he married, could give away their own baby like this, "as one advertises an item of furniture for sale" (Krauss *Great House* 266). By likening the child to a piece of furniture, he indirectly likens it to the desk, which Lotte also gave away at one point, although he deemed it her most valued possession. The desk, from being an object symbolic of everything unknown about Lotte, and Lotte's supposed former lover, changes to a symbol of her child, in Arthur's perception. Lotte's giving away her child is symptomatic of her trauma. As Uytterschout and Versluys, paraphrasing LaCapra (*Writing History* 28), point out, seemingly irresponsible or unethical behavior are signs of traumatization, and "giving consideration to other people" (234) is something beyond the ability of some survivor-sufferers. Childcare, in Lotte's state of traumatization is not something she considers herself able to accomplish. Thus, by acknowledging this, she may have saved her child's life by giving it away. (A similar case was discussed in the traumatized Thomas Schell Sr. in Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, who leaves his wife when she becomes pregnant.) Giving the desk away to Daniel Varsky at a point when he is her child's approximate age is an intimate act of passing on an important object to a loved or valued person. To the readers, in this plotline, the desk is an object symbolic of the Holocaust and the traumata it has caused.

#### 4.2.2 Collecting Symbolic Objects – Holocaust Trauma and Redemption

Appearing in the plotline labeled "Swimming Holes" in part II of the novel, the character George Weisz leads over to the last and shortest narrative strand of the novel, simply entitled "Weisz". George Weisz is a Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor who has specialized in finding furniture that Jews were forced to abandon or that was stolen from them. In his narration, the role of the desk as an object symbolic of the Holocaust becomes the most apparent. Weisz, a symbolic Holocaust ghost character, is strongly tied to the desk, a symbolic Holocaust object.

One evening after Lotte's death, Weisz, a man with an Israeli accent, close to Arthur Bender's own age, comes to Arthur's door. He asks for a few words and introduces himself and his business: "My name is Weisz, [...]. There is something I'd like to discuss with you, Mr. Bender. [...]. A desk" (Krauss *Great House* 273). Weisz is described as someone who simply but elegantly dresses in a suit. He uses a walking stick with a silver handle in the shape of a ram's head. The ram's horn, the shofar, is an important Jewish symbol. It is blown into at Rosh HaShana, the Jewish New Year, and at Yom Kippur, the

Day of Atonement. It is reminiscent of the Binding of Isaac, the Torah story of Abraham finding a ram caught in a bush by its horns when he is about to sacrifice his son Isaac. The ram's head is also associated with the diabolical in Western culture. It is symbolic of Weisz as an ambiguous character. On the one hand he is a 'just' figure in his attempt to re-establish former ownership of Jewish possessions; on the other hand, he passes on transgenerational trauma (cf. LaCapra *Writing History*) to his children through his behavior in the form of communicative memory (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*) who become heavily burdened by this postmemory (cf. Hirsch).

Weisz identifies as Jewish; he immigrated to Israel, fleeing from the Nazis. However, he has not taken roots in Israel but, after his wife's death, travels the world, together with his two children, representing the 'wandering Jew', not able to find a place to call 'home'. He describes his work thus:

My business has always been to listen. People come to me. [...] They begin to talk and I go with them back to their childhoods, before the war. [...]. Their childhoods, Mr. Bender, because it is only those who were children who come to me now. The others have died. (Krauss *Great House* 274)

Weisz' statement in the text stresses the fact that eye-witnesses to the Holocaust are 'dying out' (cf. Assmann *Cultural Memory*). He himself is one of those former children who watched his parents being disowned and taken away to be killed. What he does for others, trying to reconstruct their past for them, he also does for himself. Throughout his life as an adult he has been hunting down furniture that used to belong in his father's study in Hungary. His goal is to complete the study as it was, in his house in Jerusalem. He does not do this for posterity, not even for his own children. It is done for his own sake. The story accompanying his collection, although it is fictitious, serves as an example of representing Holocaust trauma and its consequences.

His clients, Holocaust survivors, are hardly able to talk about what they are looking for and Weisz has to take utmost care of being an empathetic listener: "Like a doctor, I listen without saying a word" (Krauss *Great House* 275). Although his work with mostly traumatized clients benefits from his doctor-like qualities it is rather the traits of a detective that help him complete his assignments. Looking for specific objects, pre-war antique furniture, it helps that he is familiar with the mindset of people like himself, who want certain objects for reasons of nostalgia (cf. Lowenthal 8 ff. "Wanting the past"), catharsis, or redemption. He also familiarizes himself with the market demands, with the habits of 'regular' collectors, and also war criminals, in order to achieve his goals of finding specific furniture. The text creates a character in Weisz, who sets out to rectify wrongs done by the Nazi regime. It reflects a demand in contemporary society, in which the respon-

sible officials do little or nothing, letting time pass in the hope of the problems solving themselves simply by the victims of such crimes dying out. The German government specifically, who should hold itself responsible for clearing up Nazi war crimes, does comparatively little to help Jews find and recover their family possessions, for example.

Retrieving Nazi-plundered art has come into public focus (again) with the spectacular case of the German art collector Gurlitt, in whose possession 458 of a collection of 1.400 paintings, are under initial suspicion of having been stolen from Jewish citizens during the Holocaust, among them valuable paintings by famous artists such as Monet, Manet, Matisse, Picasso, and Renoir<sup>76</sup>. The ‘Causa Gurlitt’, as the case is called in the German media, has triggered debates about cognizance, complicity, guilt, and compensation. It was Gurlitt’s father who collected the pictures and passed them on to his son, posing the question of the son’s liability. Upon Gurlitt’s death in May 2014, Gurlitt’s legal representative announced that the collection goes to the Bern art museum in Switzerland and that those paintings identified as loot would be returned to the heirs of their Jewish owners. However, the entire case was only discovered upon the police investigating Gurlitt because of tax fraud. It exposes how little has been done to investigate crimes against Jewish families, and to rectify wrongs committed during the Nazi era. The German officials have been waiting so long to approach this task systematically, that the original owners are long dead.

The character Weisz presents himself as someone who can “produce a solution. [...] I can’t bring the dead back to life. But I can bring back the chair they once sat in, the bed where they slept” (ibid.). In contrast to the ‘real life’ example of famous paintings given above, the symbolic objects in the novel can be faked easily. Him ‘producing’ the objects is a word he uses repeatedly. He is not only the seeker of objects, but also their deliverer, and sometimes, their ‘creator’. When at times he cannot find the exact piece of furniture because “[t]hings don’t last forever” (Krauss *Great House* 276), he finds replica: “[E]ven if it no longer exists, I find it. Do you understand what I am saying? I produce it. Out of thin air, if need be” (ibid.), he explains to Arthur. People are willing to re-construct their memory of the furniture they lost in order to match the furniture Weisz delivers. It does not even have to be an original, authentic object that triggers memory. The *idea* of the original is enough.

The changing nature of human memory and nostalgic longing (cf. Lowenthal) work in Weisz’ advantage, because his clients *want* to believe he found the real piece. Even if the client notices for a second that it is not the original, “his memory will be invaded by the reality of the bed

76 For a comprehensive timeline of the discoveries, cf. <http://orf.at/stories/2217852/2217861/>.

standing before him. Because he needs it to be that bed where she once lay with him more than he needs to know the truth" (ibid.). Thus, in the case of a 'fake' object being presented, clients readily reconstruct their memory of the object to match its current state. The relief and the 'flood of memories' (reminiscent of Proust's *mémoire involontaire* triggered by an object, as described in Assmann, *Introduction*), brought about by supposedly having found what they were looking for, is more important than the object's authenticity in this instant. Weisz does not consider this measure 'cheating'; to him the clients get what they came for, a piece of memory. "[W]hen at last I produce the object they have been dreaming of for half a lifetime, that they have invested with the weight of their longing. It's like a shock to their system. They've bent their memories around a void, and now the missing thing has appeared," says Weisz (Krauss *Great House* 275). He brings back objects that, symbolically, represent memories. Neither the material value, nor even the authenticity of the objects plays an important role in their memory-function.

In a key passage of the text, Weisz equates the loss of objects, and thereby memories, of Jews during the World War II era to another important historical event in Judaism: the loss of Jewish symbolic objects and memory due to the (second) destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. He explains the importance of his rediscovering his clients' objects by likening them to missing Temple items, claiming finding the missing furniture, for his clients, is "as if [I]'d produced the gold and silver sacked when the Romans destroyed the Temple two thousand years ago" (ibid.). As the Temple objects have been missing for nearly two-thousand years, their reappearance would be a miracle. Equating their reappearance to Weisz bringing back stolen furniture, the text stresses the importance these objects take on for the survivors with regard to their symbolic value in triggering and supporting memories of loved ones and safe family environments. Weisz states that the Romans destroyed or hid the holy objects for reasons of extinguishing Jewish memory, creating a memory gap, or blank:

The holy objects looted by Titus that mysteriously disappeared so that the cataclysmic loss would be total, so that there would be no evidence left to keep the Jew from turning a place into a longing he could carry with him wherever he wandered, forever. (ibid.)

The importance placed by Jews, especially religious Jews, on the remaining wall of the Temple, the Wailing Wall, bespeaks of the fact that it has become such a 'place of longing,' even without the holy objects. By Weisz bringing to memory that the Nazis' attempt to destroy Jewry was not the first in history, although the most extensive one, and by putting forward the idea of loss not only with regard to murdered humans but with regard to what was lost

to the survivors, the text stresses the importance of memory and the role that objects play in it.

Taking Jewish possessions was partly done out of greed, but the grand scale of coordinated, orchestrated Nazi action also served the purpose of destroying all traces of former people's existence. Those who survived the Holocaust and had lost loved family members and friends were deprived even of objects reminding them of and symbolizing the lost persons, and of objects important to their own (former) identity. Through Weisz, the text likens the Romans' destruction of the Temple and the loss of the objects therein to the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis.

Weisz, having made the important connection of objects and Jewish memory, goes on to explain to Arthur the importance of the desk he is looking for: "But the desk, you see—it *isn't like the other* pieces of furniture" (ibid., my italics). About himself, he uses similar words:

But the one searching for this desk *isn't like the others*, [...]. He doesn't have the capacity to forget just a little. His memory cannot be invaded. [...] His memory is more real to him, more precise, than the life he lives, which becomes more and more vague to him. (Krauss *Great House* 276, my italics)

To the readers, Weisz appears to be speaking of himself, only in the third person. It is he who wants the desk, which used to belong to his father, for his collection. Arthur cannot know this and must think of an insistent client, when Weisz states: "You can't imagine how he hounds me, Mr. Bender. How he calls and calls. How he torments me" (ibid.). Weisz goes on to describe the client speaking Yiddish: "Nu? Anything?" and tells Arthur how he receives letters from him in the mail (Krauss *Great House* 277). The 'client' takes on character traits of Weisz' father, ghost-like qualities, as the father is dead, bringing on associations of Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet's dead father's ghost haunts him from beyond the grave. Weisz speaks of the 'client' as of a live person, however. If Weisz is indeed referring to his dead father, he must mean his father not finding peace in death:

And I understood then that he could not die until I found the desk. That he wanted to die, but he could not. I became afraid. I wanted to be through with him. What right did he have to burden me with this? With the responsibility of his life if I didn't find it, and his death if I did? (ibid.)

As a Holocaust trauma survivor-sufferer, in the sense of Duggan, Weisz rather appears to be talking of a completely dissociated part of himself. *He* is the one who is not at peace with his life, who seeks to die, and who commits suicide after seeing the desk one more time. However, Weisz's father is a person whose memory has strongly influenced George Weisz' life. Weisz,

for example, recounts how his father tied him to the desk ideologically at a very young age. For his fourth birthday, his father gave him a key to the only one of the drawers with a lock, for him to put in whatever he wanted. Weisz experienced this as a 'crushing responsibility' (Krauss *Great House* 284). He left the drawer empty and locked it.

While Weisz' father was a historian, George Weisz makes a living as a business man dealing with antiquities. Thus, history plays an important part in his business, as well: "Out of the ruins of history I produced a chair, a table, a chest of drawers," he states (Krauss *Great House* 285). Reconstructing his father's study is as much an act of recreating a childhood memory, as one of attempting to rectify the wrong that was done to his father.

Weisz is a collector of furniture, and for this special collection, he needs a special room in his house. Baudrillard writes about the collector:

Because he feels alienated and abolished by a social discourse whose rules escape him, the collector strives to reconstitute a discourse that is transparent to him, a discourse whose signifiers he controls and whose referent *par excellence* is himself. (114)

The alienation Weisz feels is the one of not understanding human society and behavior after the horrendously traumatic event of the Holocaust. (Re-)collecting his family's furniture gives him a sense of control over his life again. However, when it comes to true living and interpersonal exchange, communication, "he [the collector] is doomed to fail. [...] This kind of totalization by means of objects always bears the stamp of solitude. It fails to communicate with the outside, and communication is missing within it," says Baudrillard (*ibid.*). Solitude and lack of communication are distinct character traits of George Weisz. He tries to set up his own discourse of control, and fails, as his children eventually leave his sphere of control and actively work against him.

What is good enough for others, a replica of the original object, is not good enough for Weisz. He cannot fool himself with a replica of the desk. As he lives only for the search of the missing object, everything else, even his own children, have become secondary and 'vague' to him. His traumatic memory dominates him. It can be argued that the search for symbolic memory objects is his way of 'working through' his trauma. However, the obsession which he has allowed it to become rather gives off the impression that he is in a state of 'acting out' his trauma, by remaining in the past instead of appreciating his life in the *present* and thinking about the consequences of his actions for his children's *future*. To him, the only life worth living took place during his childhood, when his family was intact and happy. As Lowenthal states about the past, "nostalgia is memory with the pain removed. The pain is today" (8).



Arthur tells Weisz that Lotte gave the desk away twenty-eight years ago, which is a shock to Weisz, who had deemed himself close to the fulfillment of his self-set task. Arthur feels a close connection to Weisz, as they both suffered under the desk, he under its presence, Weisz under its absence. Weisz, upon hearing that the desk has yet again eluded his grasp, tells Arthur the story of Yochanan ben Zakkai, one of his father's, a scholar of Jewish history, favorite stories.<sup>77</sup> Prophesying Roman victory to Vespasian (serving under Emperor Titus) during the siege of Jerusalem, ben Zakkai was allowed to open a school of Jewish learning in Yavne. In 70 CE, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and ben Zakkai ordered for the religious practices and practice of religious law, until then only possible at the Temple, to be transferred to Yavne. Ritualistic sacrifice of animals was abandoned. This school in Yavne became a collecting point of Jewish knowledge where the Talmud was compiled and was later known by the title of Great House<sup>78</sup>, which is used as the title of the novel by Krauss, in an example of paratextuality in the sense of Pfister/Genette.

Three questions lead ben Zakkai to the establishment of the 'Great House', as recounted by Weisz: "What is a Jew without Jerusalem? How can you be a Jew without a nation? How can you make a sacrifice to God if you don't know where to find him?" (Krauss *Great House* 278). Weisz sums up ben Zakkai's 'answers' thus: "Turn Jerusalem into an idea. Turn the Temple into a book. [...]. Bend a people around the shape of what they lost, and let everything mirror its absent form" (Krauss *Great House* 279). These answers mirror the story of the desk and how characters in the text live 'around' it, especially when it is absent. Weisz is a strong example of a character shaping his life around an absence symbolized by the desk. Ultimately, the text reveals that this symbolic absence represents the material absence of the Jewish Temple. The desk takes on the meaning of the question about what holds Judaism together. Objects are established as symbols for the immaterial, and it is clarified that a faith, or a collective identity as a people, is indeed based on the immaterial, that everything material, in this context, is valuable for its symbolical worth only. This holds true even for a city given as example, Jerusalem. As the city holding the remains of the 'real' Temple, the house once built from actual, material parts, Jerusalem is of immense value to Jews all over the world. However, the text stresses its *symbolic* value over its material value. In this view, it is something that cannot be 'destroyed' or 'taken away', rendering the religious disputes over the holy sites

77 Krauss' account of ben Zakkai's story is indebted to Rich Cohen's book *Israel is Real*, p. 46 ff.

78 "[...] after the phrase in Book of Kings: *He burned the house of God, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire*" (Krauss *Great House* 279).



in the city obsolete. Aleida Assmann, in her chapter on Jerusalem as a place of memory, writes:

After the destruction of the Temple, however, it was the Torah that took over this function of a central symbol. The scriptures were not confined to any location, and so they became a mobile temple or, as Heinrich Heine called it, a “portable Fatherland,” that made possible the survival of Jewish communities in exile. (*Cultural Memory* 289)

For Jews in the Diaspora, especially, the idea has long overtaken the actual object/place. The phrase ‘next year in Jerusalem’ said at the Passover Seder by Jews all over the world, takes on the implication of a ‘Jerusalem of the mind’ rather than the actual place. In this, the novel represents an especially American view on Jerusalem, or even Israel in its entirety. American Jews have chosen not to live in Israel, although it is open to them at any time. They can make the wish ‘next year in Jerusalem’ true at any moment they choose. However, they choose the *idea* over the object/place. This approach of the ‘idea’ of Jerusalem is taken up again in the chapter on symbolic objects and the family.

Weisz recalls his father telling him that “if every Jewish memory were put together, every last holy fragment joined up again as one, the House would be built again, [...], or rather a memory of the House so perfect that it would be, in essence, the original self” (ibid.). In this he does not refer to the memory of Jewish suffering, but of Jewish learning, tradition passed on orally, from generation to generation. Weisz’ father, and George Weisz himself, too, are likening the memory of ‘a people’ to the construction of a house. Or rather, furnishing a house is likened to stocking a memory. Every individual Jew, in the line of this philosophy, contributes fragments to the construction and furnishing/stocking of this memory-house. This means the collected memory of every Jew constitutes what Judaism *is*. The stress placed on pieces of furniture hitherto in the novel culminates in this key passage in which the symbolic parallel of furniture and memory is drawn with regard to Judaism.

The idea of a ‘Jerusalem of the mind’, and a ‘Temple of the mind’ is stressed further by Weisz retelling more of his father’s philosophy: “Perhaps that is what they mean when they speak of the Messiah: a perfect assemblage of the infinite parts of the Jewish memory” (ibid.). Weisz’ father, the historian, interprets the prophecy about a coming Messiah as symbolic as well, rather than waiting for an actual person in the flesh. In stating that it would take the assemblage of ‘infinite’ parts, he also suggests that the wait will never be over. That rather, *waiting and remembering* are what constitutes Judaism.

Israel becomes the country George Weisz finds a safe haven in when he leaves Hungary in 1949, aged twenty-one. Around World War II Palestine/Israel was more than an ideological place for Jews, it was a life saver. In Weisz story, the text subtly presents the importance of the land for refugees. Weisz describes how, upon his arrival in Haifa, he witnesses “[a] woman in a thin dress was bent over kissing the scorched ground, crying” (Krauss *Great House* 284). This short passage serves to illustrate that the view of an ‘imagined Jerusalem,’ an ‘imagined Israel’ is connected to the real city and country. “My father died fifty years ago on a death march to the Reich. Now I sit in a room in Jerusalem, a city he only imagined,” says Weisz (Krauss *Great House* 287). Remembering his father’s life and stories, Weisz, however, is forever bound to the past. The tragedy of his father’s death has created the wish in George Weisz to somehow right the wrong done to his father by trying to materially reassemble the family past. This is discussed further in the chapter on symbolic objects and family.

The aspect of Holocaust ghosts in *Great House*, despite its importance, is a residual aspect, as it is in *The History of Love*. The symbolic ghost characters Lotte and Weisz are old, near the end of their lives, tied to their traumatic pasts. They die at the end of ‘their’ narrations. Plotlines with younger characters, anchored in the present and forward-oriented, share equally in the narrations. In Raymond Williams’ sense, the Holocaust is a residual cultural aspect thematically anchored in dominant Jewish American memory culture. Reference to it, for example in writing, by means of (symbolic) objects or characters, is present. However, the Holocaust is not the sole focus, and focus is shifting away from it in third generation Jewish American writing, without negating its importance.

In Krauss’ novel *Great House*, an object overrides the characters’ symbolic importance in representing the main themes. The primary symbolic object of the novel, the desk, in the chronology of the novel’s events, originates during the times of the Holocaust. To those characters aware of this origin, to Lotte Berg, George Weisz, and his children, and to the readers, it will always keep the meaning of a symbolic Holocaust object. However, the further symbolic meanings it takes on for the characters in its possession later, are of equal importance. In this, as is seen in the following two sub-chapters, the desk reflects a basic equality of the three themes (Holocaust) ghosts, writing, and family, yet renders the Holocaust theme residual, presenting writing as the dominant theme, and stressing emergent aspects of family representation in third generation Jewish American fiction. Also, in connection with the family theme, a Jewish American perspective on Israel is introduced, a current Jewish issue with regard to rights and obligations of a nation, focusing on the present, and on future questions of the direction

the nation will take, both of which the Holocaust past, nevertheless, is an important aspect.

### 4.3 The Desk as an Object Symbolic of Writing and Writers

References to writing and writers are as prominent in Krauss' *Great House* as they are in her earlier *The History of Love*. Writing is again the dominant theme, only surpassed in importance by the theme of memory. Literary references occur in the form of intertextual references in the sense of Pfister/Genette. The love of poetry and prose as art forms, the anxieties and sacrifices accompanying writing as a creative process, and also the struggles within families about the choice of writing as a career are negotiated and represented always in the context of fictitious, as well as 'real' writers and their writing in Krauss' text. In writing, the represented characters all deal with memories. Thus, the importance of writing as a storage medium of memory (cf. Assmann *Introduction*) is established by the text itself.

A *desk* is an obvious choice as an object symbolic of writing and writers. It is the place where writers work, where writing is practiced. In *Great House*, the same desk belongs to three different writers, passed on from one to the next: from the novelist Lotte Berg, living in London, the desk being in her possession roughly from 1949-1970, to the Chilean poet Daniel Varsky, in New York, from 1970-1972, to novelist Nadia (no last name given), in New York, from 1972-1999. A fourth writer, Dov, an Israeli judge moved to London, is not personally tied to the desk. He is roughly the same age as Nadia, who, in an accident in Israel, runs him over in her car, which establishes a connection between the plotlines. He is an aspiring writer whose plans are thwarted by his dominant father and by fate. The novel's main symbolic object, the desk, which is the most important aspect of all other three plotlines, tellingly, does *not* make an appearance in Dov's plotline, a fact which symbolically points toward Dov's 'failure' in becoming a writer. The reason for his not becoming a writer is his traumatization in a deployment in the Yom Kippur War.

These writing characters are well-rounded characters with complex life-stories, just like the other characters of the novel. Characters are, however, in the entirety of the novel, not the focus. The focus, as stated earlier, lies on one single object, the desk that ties all plots together. In one writer in particular, Nadia, a reclusive New York novelist, the occupation as a writer in its solitary nature, isolated work environment, and its general and specific anxieties is described in great detail and is particularly entwined with the desk's fate. Daniel Varsky the poet's story and connection to the desk are

told in Nadia's narrative. The character Lotte Berg, who has been analyzed in connection with the desk's Holocaust symbolism previously, is a writer. To her, the desk takes on the meaning of a tool. Dov, not directly connected to the desk, is, however, tied to the narrative device through Nadia, who comes to Israel to retrieve the desk and on this trip accidentally runs over Dov in a car.

#### 4.3.1 Desks as Objects Symbolic of 'Lives of the Mind'

The parts "Swimming Holes" I and II introduce the writer Lotte Berg. The traumatized Jewish Holocaust escapee living in London writes in solitude at the desk in her attic, like Anne Frank. She lives a reclusive life together with her husband, and due to her Holocaust trauma, she has withdrawn from public life. Her husband avoids the attic, as he says, "out of respect for her work and privacy, without which she wouldn't have survived" (Krauss *Great House* 87). Her work being necessary for survival is meant with regard to her mental state. Her stories are a way for her to reveal something of herself to the outside world, without having to communicate with people directly. As she includes aspects of her traumatizing past in her writing, it is essential to her that she is in total control of the terms on which she voices this past.

Professionally, both Lotte and Arthur are concerned with literature as a storage medium. When Arthur first meets her, she has a daytime job at the British Library and writes at night. Arthur, a professor of English, describes her with a line from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock": "*There will be time, / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet*—because she alone in that room seemed not to have had time, or not to have thought to take the time" (Krauss *Great House* 82). She appears to him like someone who is not prepared to be confronted with other people. His first impression proves right.

Lotte writes at the giant desk that Arthur finds threatening and horrible and which he describes in terms of gothic horror, as analyzed previously. To him, this desk stands for the person who gave it to her, a former lover, and for unknowable Holocaust horror. To Lotte, the desk is her work place, an instrument. She never mentions the person who gave it to her. When the young poet Daniel Varsky comes to their house, as an admirer of Lotte's writing, she strikes up a friendship with him based on their mutual interest in writing. Another connection between the two is the fact that the child Lotte gave away would have been Daniel Varsky's age at the time she meets him. Without telling her husband, she gives Daniel her desk despite valuing it more than other objects. She gives it as a gift of appreciation from one writer to another, or as a mother who would provide her child with necessary means.

Arthur mentions his feelings about the kind of story Lotte writes at the desk: "Strange and often disturbing stories that she left out, I assumed, for me to read" (Krauss *Great House* 84). His assumption that she leaves her writing lying around for him to find means the stories constitute a form of communication between the two. In them, Lotte tries to convey to her husband the depth of negative and disturbing feelings she harbors, to make him understand why she cannot talk about her past. Her stories may be meant to be read as allegories and may as well reflect true experiences in part, as Lotte lived under what Arthur assumes to have been atrocious conditions at a very young age, before being able to leave for England.

Two of Lotte's stories are summarized by Arthur. The first one is about children: "Two children who take the life of a third child because they covet his shoes, and only after he is dead discover that the shoes don't fit, and pawn them off to another child, whom the shoes fit, and who wears them with joy" (ibid.). On an abstract level the story reflects the futility of war on grounds of greed. The story likely relates to experiences of her own, which would explain Lotte's alienation from other humans and her choice to live as a recluse. Lotte's second story mentioned by Arthur is about war time issues more explicitly: "A bereaved family out for a drive in an unnamed country at war, who accidentally drive across enemy lines and discover an empty house, in which they take up residence, oblivious of the horrific crimes of its former owner" (Krauss *Great House* 84). Lotte's two stories are about objects being taken away from humans. They have in common an element of joy, centering on possession of objects, in people oblivious of the pain of others. In this element, they are disturbing to Arthur.

Arthur states that Lotte writes in English, "of course" (Krauss *Great House* 84). She has separated herself from her German identity so much that not even in the last stage of her Alzheimer's does she fall back into speaking German. Although it is her native language, it has taken on more significance as the language of the perpetrators. This refusing to use the German language displays one aspect of her choice of trauma suppression, or 'acting out'. The title of her first collection of short stories, *Broken Windows* (Krauss *Great House* 87), is reminiscent of George Weisz' home's broken window before the Nazis come to take his parents, and generally, of Kristallnacht, 1938. Germany is not represented in her work, except for her date and place of birth, Nuremberg, 1921, on the last page of her book (Krauss *Great House* 88). Nevertheless, there is one story in the collection, called "Children Are Terrible for Gardens", which, according to Arthur, reflects her horrific experience of Nazi Germany:

It was about a landscape architect in an unnamed country, an egoist so taken with his own talent that he is willing to collaborate with the officials of the country's brutal regime in order to see that a large park he has designed

is built [...].When the secret police begin to bury the bodies of murdered children under the park's foundations in the middle of the night, he turns a blind eye. (ibid.)

The content of the story is similar to that of Nicole Krauss' 2012 short story "An Arrangement of Light". It treats the question of acquiescence with a totalitarian system. The admiration of the garden by those unaware of the atrocities, enjoying an unjust system's fruits, so to speak, is similar to the joy experienced by beneficiaries of unjustly acquired objects in the two stories by Lotte summarized previously. This constitutes a recurring motif in Lotte's work. Arthur states that for a long time after reading that particular story, he "would catch [him]self staring at [his] wife, feeling a little bit afraid" (ibid.). By using her experiences, in disguised forms, in her work, Lotte is able to negotiate them without a direct confrontation. Opposed to conversation, in writing, she can deal with her experiences without having to answer to questions of others. Arthur knows and respects this. He is aware that life would not be possible for her, otherwise.

[...] her sanity, her ability to carry on with life, [...], depended on her ability and my solemn agreement to cordon off those nightmarish memories, to let them sleep like wolves in a lair, and to do nothing that might threaten their sleep. (Krauss *Great House* 246)

The dangerous nature of her memories is symbolized by Arthur likening them to predators. Arthur realizes that the possibility of 'awakening' certain 'dangerous' memories must be in Lotte's hands alone. "That she visited these wolves in her dreams, [...] and even wrote about them, however many times metamorphosed into other forms, I knew well enough," he states (ibid.). Arthur summarizes the importance of Lotte's work to her well-being as her ability to deal self-sufficiently with her suffering, "turning a silent scream into the weight of private work" (Krauss *Great House* 256). His loneliness is reflected in his realization. The impossibility of talking to each other of the unspeakable and the feeling of her not talking to him because she must and *can* master all her problems alone, make him rethink the foundation of their relationship. "No matter how bleak or tragic her stories were, their effort, their creation, could only ever be a form of hope, a denial of death or a howl of life in the face of it," he states (ibid.). "Whether I existed downstairs or not, she would continue to do what she had always done *alone at her desk*, and it was that work that allowed her to survive, not my care and company" (ibid., my italics). The previous chapter analyzed Arthur's envy and fear of the desk. In this statement the desk is only an object symbolic of Lotte's work. Arthur's assessment of his significance in her life pales next to this inanimate symbolic object which, from a writer's perspec-

tive, is represented merely as a tool. It loses its threatening nature in this different symbolic value, yet is the basis for loneliness and disappointment for Arthur in the realization of his insignificance in Lotte's life, compared to her writing. For Lotte, writing is a means of dealing with her traumatic memory. The desk is more of a companion to her in this than her husband. It is easier to handle than human relationships, as it does not talk, ask questions, or demand attention. This is why Lotte chooses a 'life of the mind' as opposed to living truly in the 'real' and present, or maintaining an active social life. Negotiating her trauma in her fiction is as close as she can get to 'working through' it.

Another writer, Dov, an Israeli man, is introduced in "True Kindness" I and II. Dov's story, in the form of his father's narration addressing his son, begins with his father Aaron stating he does not support his son's plan to become a writer. Aaron summarizes Dov's work thus:

[...] a convoluted story about four, six, maybe eight people all lying in rooms joined by a system of electrodes and wires to a great white shark. All night the shark floats suspended in an illuminated tank, dreaming the dreams of these people. No not the dreams, the nightmares, the things too difficult to bear. So they sleep, and through the wires the terrifying things leave them and flood into the awesome fish with scarred skin that can bear all the accumulated misery. (Krauss *Great House* 47)

The objects in this summary of Dov's writing are symbolic of Dov's fate. The electrodes and wires attached to the shark and mentioned repeatedly, mirror the state of Dov's body in the hospital, after he is in an accident. Nadia, the narrator of the plotline "All Rise" addresses her entire narrative to him. He is a judge by profession, and is called "Your Honor" by her. He is, however, in a coma after she has accidentally hit him and thus cannot hear her.

Dov's story is one of the material world his father lives in, versus a life of the mind, which Dov prefers. His father Aaron is a patriarch who sees a weakness in his younger son which he tries to eradicate by being strict, sometimes even tyrannical. This weakness he sees is Dov's preoccupation with mental faculties, as opposed to being interested in things like manual labor. Aaron feels that his son Dov is someone who from a very young age, has a melancholy disposition and, in Aaron's opinion, has chosen to occupy himself with suffering. Aaron's life's motto, on the other hand, is to control one's emotions: "Suffering, I said to you. [...] Listen to me, Dov, you have to take control of it. You have to grab it by the horns and wrestle it down. You have to suffocate it or it will suffocate you" (Krauss *Great House* 65). Aaron has been through suffering himself, first as a Zionist immigrant to Israel with his parents, subsequently being drawn into Israel's first war to defend the newly founded country, and having to go to war again in the next Israeli

war, as well. His focus on suppressing suffering by pretending it does not affect him makes Aaron appear active and lively, when actually, it is a symptom of 'acting out' his war traumata. He has a strong connection to Israel as a country and sees his suffering for it as necessary and justified. Dov, on the other hand, is a melancholy child and never loses this character trait. He is a loner and an eccentric, who lives a life of the mind, not of physical presence. Like all Israelis he has to do military service, but he is not an ardent Zionist.

While in the army, Dov regularly sends home packages containing additions to his manuscript of his shark novel. His father is aware of Dov's instructions to preserve his privacy by not opening his packages: "Your mother passed on your instructions that these packages were not to be touched except to be placed in a drawer of your desk" (Krauss *Great House* 66). The desk mentioned here is not the same desk as in the other plotlines. It is an important object for Dov, however, as it symbolizes his privacy. The desk is in his childhood room in his parents' house. It is an object that he considers safe in keeping his 'secrets', the personal contents of his writing. The manuscript itself is an object symbolic of the nature of the communication between father and son. This communication is deeply disturbed by breaches of trust between them.

Despite Dov's request, his father reads all manuscript parts, secretly. Aaron does not feel bad about breaching his son's privacy. "Sometimes I even convinced myself that you knew I broke open the packages and read what you wrote; that you meant for me to read it," he says, in an attempt to justify his deed (Krauss *Great House* 66). Aaron becomes increasingly intrigued with his son's writing the more he reads:

[...] I steamed open the envelopes and read about the shark, and the interconnected nightmares of many. About the janitor who cleaned the tank every night, wiping the glass and checking the tubes and the pump that sent fresh water in—who would pause in his work to check on the feverish, shivering bodies asleep in their beds, who would lean on his mop and stare into the eyes of the tormented white beast covered in electrodes, attached to tubes, who every day grew sicker and sicker from absorbing the pain of so many. (ibid.)

In the recurring image of the shark being attached to tubes, Dov's state after his accident is mirrored again. When he is in the hospital fighting for his life, he is attached to life support systems, similar to the shark's. He, too, has absorbed the pain of others and 'made it his'. Like the shark, he grows sicker and sicker from this pain, which leads to his suicide attempt. His poor relationship with his own father is only one factor of many in his depression.



His war experiences and the reproaches from parents of dead soldiers after the war, of not saving their son, are what traumatized him.

Having started out wanting to become a writer, then declining a military career in favor of the idea of studying philosophy, and after the war choosing to study law in England, Dov, in his final career choice displays an interest in establishing justice. Injustice and suffering in the world are things that bring him down. He leaves Israel because of the associations with war. Fighting for his country has not made him strong-willed to remain, like his father. Quite the contrary, he wants to escape the violence which has alienated him from his native country. He cannot share the attachment to the country that is so important to his father. Attachment to objects, materialism, in this narration is replaced by attachment to and love of a specific country, Israel.

Upon hearing that Dov plans to study philosophy, his father asks him for the practical value:

I'm no fool; I recognize the value of expanding the human picture. But for you, my child, I wished a life of solid things. To move in the opposite direction, toward greater and greater abstraction, seemed to me a disaster for you. [...] I tried to guide you. (Krauss *Great House* 68)

This 'guidance' that Aaron provides is clumsy and helpless. While Dov sits in the garden reading "books on the alienation of modern man," (ibid.), for example, his father is busy gardening, working the soil with his own hands. In his opinion, "[t]he Jews have been living in alienation for thousands of years. For modern man it's a hobby" (ibid.). The inability of both father and son to understand each other's approach to life becomes clear in exchanges like this.

In the end, Aaron is glad he is not the one who dissuades his son from writing. He has grown fond of his son's writing although he is unable to tell him so. He is flattered that his son confides in him the wish to become an author, yet cannot express his delight at being the one he confides in:

When you came to me to tell me about the book you planned to write I was taken aback. I couldn't understand what made you decide to come to me of all people—me, with whom you shared so little of yourself, [...]. I was too slow to respond as I might have liked. I couldn't change so fast. I assumed the old position. (Krauss *Great House* 179)

This lost opportunity of telling his son he appreciates his work weighs heavy on Aaron's mind. He keeps mentioning that they will not have much more time together to resolve their problems, assuming it is him who, due to his age, will die soon. His son having an accident is not what he had in mind when he says "We're running out of time, you and I" (Krauss *Great House*

173). Aaron remembers how Dov, as a little boy asked him about death and how he reacted: "Will I die? And as you said the words horror filled me as it had never before, tears burned my eyes" (Krauss *Great House* 176). The son he seems to understand and love so little, is in truth very dear to him and touches upon a soft spot that Aaron has been trying to deny all his life. He does have empathy and compassion for others, and especially for his own sons. But he would rather not display it, for fear of allowing weakness to take hold and destroy him.

For Aaron, the shark of Dov's story begins to symbolize his failed relationship with his son: "A shark that is a repository for human sadness. Who takes all that dreamers cannot bear, who bears the violence of their accumulated feelings. How often I thought about that beast and the chance I lost with you" (Krauss *Great House* 179). As someone who suppresses his own traumatic memory, Aaron takes comfort in his son's idea of the shark as a 'trauma-repository'. Aaron, who is not an avid reader, is also grateful for his son's writing because it reveals his son's mindset to him:

And yet without your knowledge or consent, I read your book. Read it as I had never read a book before, and have never since. For the first time I'd been given a way into you. And I was in awe, Dovik, I was frightened and overwhelmed by what I found there. (Krauss *Great House* 180)

His son Dov, with whom conversation is almost impossible, is more accessible to Aaron after reading his novel. The admiration Aaron voices in his 'confession' but is not able to communicate to his son directly shows that he is not the tyrant he pretends to be. He becomes involved in interpreting the characters in the novel and has many questions about them, especially about a father figure, "heartless, and arrogant, and cruel," whom he assumes is meant to represent him (Krauss *Great House* 182). While waiting for the next package to arrive, Aaron wonders what will happen to the characters: "[...] the shark wouldn't live forever. And then what, Dovik? Where would they go, these people? How would they live? Or were they already dead?" (ibid.). He does not find out because Dov is called to military duty on the Sinai, as the Yom Kippur War starts. As the attack, mobilization and the parents' fear for both their sons are described in detail, the interpretation of the shark becomes increasingly clear: it stands for the country of Israel, with all its inhabitants pouring their worst fears into it in the form of nightmares. The shark is becoming weaker and weaker by this constant input. Its health is in decline, as is, for many, the hope for a peaceful solution to Israel's problems. Yet all factions tied to the country desperately depend on it, unable and unwilling to let go of their demands at any cost. The Yom Kippur War puts an end to Dov's writing, and to his will to live in Israel. Eventually, one

can argue, its traumatizing nature puts an end to his will to live altogether, which is why he attempts suicide.

In these two authors, two Jewish themes are connected to writing. In Lotte, writing becomes her outlet for dealing with traumatic Holocaust memory. Dov's career as a writer is forestalled by his war trauma obtained during the Yom Kippur War. Both Lotte and Dov are characters that have mostly withdrawn from human society and who do not place much importance on the material world. While in Lotte's case, the symbolism of the desk she works at is discussed in detail, the plotline about Dov is more concerned with his general rejection of the material world. Therefore, not much importance is attributed to material objects in his story.

#### 4.3.2 The Desk as an Object Symbolic of Literary Achievement

In the narration entitled "All Rise" I and II, the protagonist Nadia, a writer living in New York City, tells her life story as a first-person-narrative in the form of a monologue that, like the other narrators' tales, resembles a confession. Her plotline is focused on writing, with no further thematic issues such as family stories or Holocaust memory. Nadia's life is centered on writing at her desk, only. Partners come and go, but the desk remains a constant in her life, until it is taken from her, which leaves a gap she cannot fill. Nadia's story is framed by an accident she causes in Israel. However, this is not clear to the reader from the beginning. As in *The History of Love*, in *Great House*, too, Krauss employs narrative blanks (cf. Iser) to actively involve the readers in the construction of meaning of her text. The narrator, Nadia, tells her story as a confession to a character she calls "Your Honor" (e.g. Krauss *Great House* 3). It is the person she has hit with her car, Dov, the exiled Israeli, analyzed previously, who is, in fact, a judge. Nadia is confessing her life to him while he is unconscious and she guards his hospital bed until his father arrives. The readers 'witness' Nadia's 'confession', 'judging' it while reading. Nadia is not aware that Dov tried to commit suicide by being hit by her car.

Nadia mentions one family member, her grandmother who lives in a home, and one friend, called Paul Alpers. No other family member or friend is mentioned by name, other than Daniel Varsky, a Chilean poet whom she becomes acquainted with through her friend Paul. Her lover is only referred to by his initial, R, as is her later husband, S. Neither of the relationships is permanent. When R leaves her, this causes an effect mainly by him taking all his furniture, leaving her with almost nothing. R has inherited all his furniture from his family. Nadia's family is hardly mentioned, and she owns no furniture. As her apartment is empty upon R leaving, Nadia's friend Paul

suggests she offer her place as a “foster home” (Krauss *Great House* 5) to the furniture of the young poet Daniel Varsky, who wants to return to his native country, Chile.

When Nadia goes to Daniel Varsky’s place to look at the desk and other furniture, she finds him living in a “mess—papers all over the floor, coffee-stained Styrofoam cups, notebooks, plastic bags, cheap rubber shoes, divorced records and sleeves,” (Krauss *Great House* 8). Only the walls are empty, except for maps of the cities he has lived in: “Jerusalem, Berlin, London, Barcelona” (ibid.). He lives in a creative chaos. When Nadia turns her attention to the furniture of her “host and benefactor” as she calls him, she sees first the desk and its many drawers, and second his bookshelves, “crammed with volumes in Spanish, French, and English” (ibid.). Nadia and Daniel connect via poetry. They discover they have diverse favorites in common such as the poets César Vallejo, Rainer Maria Rilke, W. H. Auden, Pablo Neruda, Nicanor Parra, and Federico García Lorca. Of the latter, Varsky even states that he once worked at the same desk. The writers they discuss are, except for Sappho, all male:

We talked then of Polish poetry, of Russian poetry, of Turkish and Greek and Argentine poetry, of Sappho and the lost notebooks of Pasternak, of the death of Ungaretti, the suicide of Weldon Kees and the disappearance of Arthur Cravan, who Daniel claimed was still alive, [...]. (Krauss *Great House* 9)

Although Nadia addresses many anxieties about writing, being a woman writer is not one of them. The mention of Cravan and Daniel’s belief he is still alive takes on a note of foreshadowing once Daniel disappears himself, as is the mention of Lorca, who died under unclear circumstances. A poem by Federico García Lorca entitled “The Fable and Round of the Three Friends” from his 1939 collection *Poet in New York*, is equally eerie in connection to Daniel’s disappearance:

Then I realized I had been murdered.  
They looked for me in cafes, cemeteries and churches  
[...] but they did not find me.  
They never found me?  
No. They never found me.

The poet himself reflecting on his murder, the places his friends would search for him, and the fact that his body would never be discovered are foreshadowing what happens to Daniel Varsky in this example of intertextuality, arguably hypertextuality, as defined by Pfister/Genette. Daniel finally quotes some of his own poetry to Nadia from his collection *Forget Everything I Ever Said*, poetry that she considers “good, not great but very

good, or maybe it was even better than very good" (ibid.). She appreciates it, but cannot truly focus because she is distracted by his attractiveness, as if reciting his poetry has transformed him.

After they spend one night together, Daniel has his furniture delivered to Nadia and leaves for Chile. He writes to her: "Take good care of Lorca's desk, one day I'll be back for it" (Krauss *Great House* 13), clarifying that the desk is only a loan. She is not able to actually correspond with him because he never includes a return address on his cards. His messages become fewer. Undiscerning musings in these messages, about either joining a speleological society or the MIR<sup>79</sup>, display Daniel Varsky's naïve worldview. He eventually becomes one of the many thousand *desaparecidos*, the 'disappeared', tortured and killed by Pinochet's regime in the 1970s. The desk, still only considered a loan by her, remains with Nadia. She keeps old postcards from Varsky in "one of the drawers of his desk" (ibid.).

As time passes, many things change in Nadia's life. Her grandmother dies, she goes out with different men, moves twice, and she tells the 'judge' that she "wrote my first novel at Daniel Varsky's desk"<sup>80</sup> (ibid.). The desk thus remains a constant in her life. The furniture given to her by Daniel takes on symbolic functions: Thinking of how the regime tortures its enemies before they are killed, she, "having fallen asleep on Daniel's sofa as I often did, [I] had nightmares about what they did to him" (ibid.). Nadia speaks about torture and sexual atrocities committed by Pinochet's men. The direct physical contact with the sofa, a symbol of Daniel himself, triggers her nightmares. Other furniture she kept for Varsky is only of minor importance, yet functions as a constant reminder of him as a writer, and of his violent death: "Sometimes, I would look around at his furniture, the sofa, desk, coffee table, bookshelves, and chairs, and be filled with a crushing despair, and sometimes just an oblique sadness" (ibid.). Nadia has no furniture of her own and, apart from her one friend, no people in her life. It becomes clear that Daniel's furniture constitutes an overbearing presence in her life.

At one point, the sofa begins to rot and has to be thrown out. This leads to Nadia thinking about throwing the rest of the furniture out, as well: "At times I thought of getting rid of the rest, too. It reminded me, when I was in

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79 El Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, Chile's revolutionary left movement, a political Chilean organization with former guerilla roots, at its height in the 1970s, still politically active, cf. [www.mir-chile.cl](http://www.mir-chile.cl).

80 "From the Desk of Daniel Varsky" is also the title of a short story by Krauss, published in Harper's Magazine, in June 2007, comprising roughly the material from pages 1-14 and page 21 of the novel *Great House*. It is the story of Nadia meeting Daniel and years later hearing of him having disappeared. The desk is already prominently featured in the short story.

a certain mood, of things I would rather forget" (ibid.). These 'things' are only implied and are connected to Nadia not being able to write poetry herself, anymore. She has no explanation for the loss of this ability. The impact of Daniel Varsky's disappearance on her life is reminiscent of trauma-behavior, of 'acting out'. The state of the sofa evokes compulsory fantasies of the decomposing body of its former owner.

The circumstances of Varsky's death are not disclosed in the novel, specifically. This gives his disappearance an unreal quality, and leaves many questions unanswered. Nadia states that she sometimes sees the remaining furniture as a riddle "he had left and I was supposed to crack" (ibid.). In order to do something for him, she writes letters to his friends asking them for poems by Varsky to make his work better known: "I had the idea I could get them published somewhere as a kind of memorial to him" (Krauss *Great House* 14). Varsky, although "his reputation grew, and he was counted among the martyred poets silenced by Pinochet" (ibid.) does not become famous. Yet his work gains importance in Nadia's esteem. His memory dominates her life when she is describing it twenty-five years later, looking back: "I became haunted by Daniel Varsky" (Krauss *Great House* 203). Varsky has become a symbolic ghost character. However, in contrast to the ghost characters analyzed previously, he is truly dead. He symbolizes not the Holocaust but the Pinochet regime, a specific Chilean trauma event. While Nadia goes on leading a 'normal' life, with ordinary daily habits, somewhere

in a basement of Chile Daniel Varsky was being tortured to death. After that the sight of the desk every morning made me want to cry, not just because it embodied the violent fate of my friend, but also because now it only served to remind me that it had never really belonged to me, nor would it ever, and that I was only an accidental caretaker. (Krauss *Great House* 204)

To Nadia, in addition to the painful imagination of her friend being tortured, another thought is added which feeds her anxiety about writing and tortures *her*: the idea that she was never 'meant' to have the desk, but only functioned as a temporary, as she says 'accidental', keeper of it. This means she doubts whether she has the right to work at the same place that acknowledged 'great' writers have held.

The desk takes on the symbolism of literary achievement. Nadia doubts her capacities for greatness as a writer, although she feels it is her designated calling to be a writer. She feels unworthy of the desk in this self-doubt. Receiving the desk, she is overwhelmed by its implications of greatness: "How could I be expected to write at such a desk? The desk of a great mind, [...] possibly the desk of Lorca, for God's sake?" (Krauss *Great House* 201/202). But it soon becomes symbolic of her feeling that "a potential in

[her] had been acknowledged, a special quality that set [her] apart and to which [she] was beholden" (Krauss *Great House* 203). In this light, the desk makes her the writer she becomes by the power of its former owners' reputation that she feels indebted to.

The decomposition of Daniel's sofa coincides with the end of her marriage to S, whose nickname for her is 'Nada', the Spanish word for nothing. She is not available emotionally in her marriage, as the name suggests. Her interrelations with people are only mentioned in asides by Nadia when she discusses the rights of an author to write about anything. Generally, she states: "I discovered that I did not need people as others did" (Krauss *Great House* 207) and she finds it tiresome to have to make conversation with others, or to invest the inevitable work in romantic relationships. Despite telling journalists to stop confusing her work of fiction with autobiography (Krauss *Great House* 28), Nadia admits to taking her own aged father's "illness and suffering, with all of its pungent detail, and finally, his death, as an opportunity to write about his life, and more specifically about his failings both as a person and as a father" (Krauss *Great House* 27). She feels guilty about this personal exploitation, despite protesting "the writer's unparalleled freedom" (Krauss *Great House* 28). This artistic freedom relieves her of moral duties and considerations, in her opinion, although she becomes increasingly unsure of her own convictions:

Yes, I believed—perhaps even still believe—that the writer should not be cramped by the possible consequences of her work. She has no duty to earthly accuracy or verisimilitude. She is not an accountant; nor is she required to be something as ridiculous and misguided as a moral compass. (ibid.)

The fact that art requires artistic freedom for authenticity and creativity stands in contrast to the artist's moral obligations in private life, however. Nadia comes to the conclusion that "[i]n her work the writer is free of laws. But in her life, Your Honor, she is not free" (ibid.). That is why she can publish the book only after her father's death. She has stricter moral demands of herself as a person than as a writer, which leads to her anxiety about writing. Authentic representation is not something she is willing to sacrifice for morality. She believes to have been "imbued with a gift," and that 'making something of it' is a "law [that] came to govern [her] life" (Krauss *Great House* 201). The price she pays for truth in art and uncompromisingly living by this 'law' is the experience of loneliness and anxiety.

Nadia claims the desk 'became hers' (Krauss *Great House* 15) over the course of the twenty-five years in her possession, on the one hand. On the other hand, she insists she "always considered [herself] only a temporary guardian" (ibid.). The vocabulary used to describe the role of the desk in her life is reminiscent of a personification, of a foster child. The wording, how-

ever, leans toward the negative. 'Guarding' the desk is a responsibility for her which she perceives as a burden rather than a joy. She is waiting for the day that she will "be relieved from my responsibility of living with and watching over the furniture of my friend, the dead poet Daniel Varsky, and that from then on I would be free to move as I wished, possibly even to another country" (ibid.). Her mentioning Daniel Varsky's full name along with his ownership of the desk, and re-stating the fact of his death shows how she ties his person and his fate to the piece of furniture. Naturally, with him meeting a violent death, the desk cannot be anything but a bearer of *sad* memory to Nadia anymore. Mentioning his occupation as a poet alongside his name represents the importance this fact has for her. He is not only a friend, he is a *poet* friend, a fellow writer. The fate he suffers is partly due to this occupation. This adds importance to the writing profession, as a political instrument, and places a responsibility of integrity on all writers, in Nadia's eyes.

The desk is described by her as a massive piece of furniture, hard to move and taking up a lot of space. Nadia feels that its actual and its metaphorical weight tie her down to New York City. With no personal relationships, she would otherwise be free to travel and move, even leaving the country altogether. With the desk, she feels this is impossible. To attribute so much importance to an object would be justifiable by its immense monetary or personal family value. The ties between Nadia and the desk are neither. Rather, they resemble survivor guilt. To Nadia, the desk, it appears, is a remaining witness to the fact that the poet Daniel Varsky once existed. While the human is gone, his murdered body disintegrating at an undisclosed location, simply 'abandoning' the desk is out of the question for her as she is the person entrusted by the poet, personally, with its 'care'. If it took to decomposing, like the sofa does after a while, throwing it out would be justified but as long as it is 'in good health', it must be kept. Although they had an affair, Nadia's interest in keeping Varsky's memory is not a romantic one. Rather, she sees him as a fellow author, sharing a passion for words, and as someone who represents hundreds if not thousands of others, murdered by the Pinochet regime. The desk is a symbol of Varsky, and Varsky is a symbol of all *desaparecidos*. In this, Varsky is a symbolic ghost character as well as a symbolic writer character. For Nadia, his quality as a fellow writer is the most memorable one.

Nadia's life is thrown off balance by a woman claiming to be Varsky's daughter, who asks to be given the desk. Nadia does not question her identity and agrees to hand over the desk with only slight hesitation. However, this call, although long anticipated, deeply disturbs Nadia's life. She is working on her eighth novel to be written at the desk and discovers that it has come to symbolize her own mind to her:



Nineteen drawers of varying size, [...], whose mundane occupations [...] hid a far more complex design, the blueprint of the mind formed over tens of thousands of days of thinking while staring at them, as if they held [...] the radical break from everything I'd ever written that would at last lead to the book I had always wanted, and always failed, to write. (Krauss *Great House* 16)

Working at the desk and having its drawers in front of her while thinking and writing has had the effect of connecting herself to it, as Nadia's only source of identity is her work. She realizes that, as there is no other person to share her life with, "no one toward whom I had to bend" (Krauss *Great House* 17), she has "physically grown around [the desk], my posture formed by years of leaning over it and fitting myself to it" (ibid.). Thus, the desk has taken on the evolving roles of, first, a symbol of her dead friend, and later of a symbolic partner. Its main role in Nadia's life, however, is being her work place and an object symbolic of writing itself.

Having to clear out the desk before giving it away, Nadia finds reminder objects from different people who owned the desk before her and reminders of the different roles the desk has taken on in her life, which make the desk a memory box in the sense of Assmann. She finds "remaindered parts of objects, long ago thrown away, [...] Daniel's postcards. [...] a yellow paperback Daniel must have forgotten years ago, a collection of stories by a writer named Lotte Berg inscribed to him from the author in 1970" (Krauss *Great House* 20). Lotte Berg, as clarified in the narrative "Swimming Holes", was the previous owner of the desk and gave it to Daniel Varsky as a gift. This connection is known to the readers but not to Nadia. Thus, like a human, the desk has secrets from her, such as its previous owners and also the (non-)contents of its one locked drawer which the reader knows to be empty, as George Weisz discloses.

Leah Weisz, George's daughter who picks up the desk, appears to resemble Daniel Varsky to Nadia (Krauss *Great House* 21). She is, in fact, an impostor. Nadia, however, wants to believe her and therefore is of the opinion that she recognizes a likeness and feels that Leah deserves to have the desk. Although she has been talking about unburdening herself of the desk, she finds it difficult to give it away, now:

I found myself struggling to accept the idea that I was about to hand over *the single meaningful object in my life as a writer*, the lone physical representation of all that was otherwise weightless and intangible, to this waif who might sit at it from time to time as if at a paternal altar. (Krauss *Great House* 23, my italics)

Nadia declaring the desk the only meaningful object in her life 'as a writer' is not the whole truth: she only has her life as a writer, nothing else. It makes

the desk the only meaningful object in her complete life, not just in her professional life. The pain its loss causes becomes apparent when she has to leave the house in order not to have to watch it “being carted away” (ibid.) by Leah, who leaves a contact address in Jerusalem. Calling Leah a waif, or fatherless child, is very fitting. Leah is not Varsky’s daughter, yet her own father, while alive, makes a ‘normal’ father-daughter relationship impossible, and the desk plays the most important role in their relationship, as is explained in detail in the following chapter.

The loss of the desk, interestingly, sets forth a process of thought in Nadia about the loss of *humans* in her life. She remembers her failed marriage and regrets not having had any children. In connection with this thought, Nadia reflects upon a short story she has written about a painting, the story of which he tells at a dinner party: two children painted it<sup>81</sup> who were later killed by their mother because she lost her mind. In the story, the children and the mother all burn to death by the mother’s hands. It is stated that they were Germans. In a parallel narration in the second part of the book narrated by Nadia, “All Rise” II, she states how the Germans after World War II burned their furniture because there was nothing else left to burn for warmth:

yes, suddenly they rose up before me wrapped in coats like dirty bandages, hacking away at the legs of tables and the arms of chairs, a little hungry fire already crackling at their feet, [...] imagine what they’d have done with such a desk. They’d have swooped down on it like vultures on the carcass of a lion—what a bonfire it would have made. (Krauss *Great House* 202)

This description adds to the sense that furniture and especially the desk, although an object, takes on symbolic value for Nadia equaling a living being. Like an animal or a person, the furniture has arms and legs, and it is likened, in its imagined destruction, to the carcass of a mighty symbolical animal, a lion. The lion as the symbol of the tribe of Judah from which King David hails, is an important Jewish symbol, as mentioned earlier. The lion is the animal in the coat of arms of Jerusalem, for example. This is one of the very sparse references to Judaism in Nadia’s narration. In this reference, the Germans being equaled to vultures, the desk takes on the symbolic value of the Jews killed by Germans. As earlier, furniture is likened to living beings, as in

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81 The story of the painting by the children was published by Krauss in *The New Yorker’s* 20 under 40 volume, June 28, 2010, titled “The Young Painters”. It contains the episode about the child painters, as well as the debate about moral responsibility of a writer, involving Nadia using her father’s life for her work. In both cases, the narrator, Nadia, uses other people’s stories without asking permission and feels the need to justify herself.

the first story, children burn, and in the second story, furniture burns. Both acts of burning bring to mind sacrificial rites connected to early Judaism.

When asked about specific writing habits tied to her way of working, Nadia is of the opinion that the means, such as a choice of handwriting or computer use, the time of day or the position, “in a saddle like Goethe, standing like Hemingway, lying down like Twain” (Krauss *Great House* 18), are of no importance to her:

No, I don't harbor any mystical ideas about writing, Your Honor, [...]. I've never bought into the idea that the writer requires a special ritual in order to write. If need be, I could write almost anywhere, as easily in an ashram as in a crowded café; or so I always insisted [...]. (ibid.)

Despite Nadia's assurance of being able to work anywhere, the loss of the desk leaves her incapable of writing. She addresses the influence of the desk's loss on her work in her confession, contradicting her previous statement: “No, what I was distraught to be losing was the familiar conditions of my work; it was sentimentality speaking and nothing else” (Krauss *Great House* 19). Realizing “the yawning emptiness where the desk had stood” (Krauss *Great House* 41), Nadia experiences the first of a series of panic attacks. She becomes agoraphobic and too incapacitated to work. At first “the attacks were set off by glancing at or being reminded of [her] work” (ibid.) but soon they extend to every aspect of her life. The effect of the desk's loss on Nadia is similar to a pathological reaction to the tragic loss of a person. None of the personal losses of humans, however, have had such an effect on her. She has had bouts of depression before, which she ties to the writing profession as “the result of the war writing wages on one's confidence and sense of purpose” (Krauss *Great House* 42). It is something that happens in between writing two books, for example, or a feeling she gets of exploiting people's lives for her own ends (Krauss *Great House* 39) which also leads to nightmares about Daniel, her father, and her former husband, S.

At her therapist's she is consoled more by the familiar furniture than by the doctor: “Folded into the familiar gray wool couch, surrounded once again by the objects I'd stared at so often in the past that they now seemed to me landmarks on the map of my psyche, I described the past two weeks” (Krauss *Great House* 43). Nadia announces to her therapist that she wants to take a trip to Jerusalem. She stresses that it is not “in order to claim back the desk” (ibid.). However, the loss of the desk is the reason for her being mentally unstable on the one hand, and mobile to travel on the other.

The only hints at a Jewish identity of Nadia are her buying sweets for her grandmother at a Jewish deli and joining a (nonreligious) Passover celebration with acquaintances. At the Passover Seder, Nadia feels alienated and drawn in by Jewish religious tradition at the same time: “[...] we—all the

guests were talking and joking [...] in the sheepishly embarrassed and so overly jocular way of Jews who are reenacting a tradition they are far enough removed from to cause a painful self-consciousness, but not far enough to give up" (Krauss *Great House* 209). Despite her reluctance to let go of religion, in her everyday life, Judaism plays no role. Her reasons for travelling to Israel are not religious motivation or strong identification as a Jew. That is why her argument of the trip not being about the desk seems rather invalid. Once arrived in Jerusalem, the city and country have a positive effect on her psyche. She is able to sleep well and is deeply moved by the view of the Old City (Krauss *Great House* 199).

Nadia regrets having given the desk away. In her search for it, she also appears to be searching for Daniel Varsky. She likens a young man, Adam, to him and with his help tries to recover the desk at Leah's address in Jerusalem (Krauss *Great House* 225). Speaking to George Weisz without knowing who he is she asks for the desk. The conversation has to be translated by Adam, as Weisz pretends to speak only Hebrew<sup>82</sup>. George Weisz denies knowing Leah or anything about the desk, although it is his life's work to re-possess it. At a later point, disappointed at not having found the desk and being mad at Adam violently repulsing her advances, Nadia runs over a man standing in the road. The reader learns that this man is the judge, "Your Honor", whom she is told to talk to while he is being taken care of medically. She tells him her entire life-story, as a confession of how things lead up to her causing the accident (Krauss *Great House* 238). This is the end of Nadia's narration.

The desk, as a symbolic object, takes on more importance than human beings in Nadia's life. Her justification of her behavior is her work and the toll it takes on writers, as writing is a lonely profession, making isolation from other people during the writing process a necessary working condition. Daniel Varsky's fate, which the desk serves as a constant reminder of, deprives her of the ability to write poetry, and drives her deeper into isolation. However, she is able to write seven novels at the desk. The loss of the desk, finally, leads to a mental breakdown and the inability to write at all anymore.

All three writers in this novel are lonely and write about suffering, theirs and others'. While Dov is part of a family, yet keeps himself apart, Lotte and Nadia are in relationships. However, neither of them open up in these relationships. Writing is described as a lonely profession entailing difficult times and isolation. Two of the writers, Lotte and Nadia, are accompanied in their loneliness, by the object that is the instrument facilitating their

82 The Hebrew words are written out in Roman letters from left to right: "lo, ani lo yodea klum al shum shulchan," (ibid., meaning: "no, I don't know anything about a table").

writing, the desk. Dov, who does not own the desk, does not make writing his profession. Both other writers depend on writing for their own sanity. Nadia is the one who takes her work to the extreme, secluding herself even from a partner, and developing a strong dependency on the desk. Dov and Lotte are writers influenced by events associated with Judaism, the Holocaust and the living conditions in Israel. Nadia is led to Israel by her search of the desk she has lost, a journey which confronts her with the emptiness in her life due to writing, symbolized by the desk, replacing any kind of human interaction.

## 4.4 Houses and Furniture as Symbolic Family Objects

Houses and furniture play important roles as symbolic objects in Krauss' *Great House* with regard to family representation. Two of the four main plotlines of the novel focus on (problematic) family constellations. The most important family represented in connection with the symbolism of the desk is the Weisz family. A second family (not given a last name) is represented as only indirectly connected to the desk. This second family, however, constitutes an important counterpart to the Weisz family narration. It depicts a family's life in Israel and represents some implications tied to Israeli Jewish identity. Memory plays an important role in the depiction of both families.

In *The System of Objects*<sup>83</sup>, Jean Baudrillard analyzes furniture symbolism in family constellations. According to him, "[t]he arrangement of furniture offers a faithful image of the familial and social structure of a period. The typical bourgeois interior is patriarchal" (13). Both family structures analyzed in this chapter are strongly patriarchal. Whether and how this is reflected in the objects depicted is analyzed in the following.

### 4.4.1 Intra-familial Transgenerational Effects of Holocaust Trauma

The narration of George Weisz in part II of the novel, entitled "Weisz", begins with the description of an idyllic family evening in Budapest in 1944. George Weisz describes how his mother is reading, his father is working at his desk and he himself, a teen-aged boy, is dreaming of ice-skating, when a stone is thrown through their window, destroying their peace (Krauss *Great*

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83 The chapters "I Structures of Interior Design", pp.13-28, and "B I Marginal Objects: Antiques", pp. 77-90, deal with furniture objects in particular.

*House* 283). The only other memory of his mother mentioned by Weisz is her screaming. Weisz narrates later that his father died “on a death march to the Reich” (Krauss *Great House* 287). Nothing is revealed of how George Weisz managed to survive the war. He describes how he returns to Budapest, finding his family house ransacked and filthy. In his mother’s closet, he finds three strands of her hair (Krauss *Great House* 285). She is not mentioned further but the text’s silence suggests a violent fate, similar to her husband’s.

“The emphasis [on furniture arrangement in this bourgeois, patriarchal setting],” according to Baudrillard, “is on unfunctionality, immovability, imposing presence and hierarchical labeling. Each room has a strictly defined role corresponding to one or another of the various functions of the family unit” (13). The desk as an object (of) ‘imposing presence’ has been the subject matter of the previous chapters concerned with symbolic objects. In this chapter, its symbolism of the patriarchal father figure is stressed in particular. George Weisz spends his life trying to reassemble his father’s study in which the family was sitting, as described above, when the Gestapo came to their house and took the parents. Basically, George Weisz, by reassembling his family’s furniture, attempts to reinstate the family as a safe environment, represented by fatherly authority. This safe space was destroyed by the Gestapo taking the parents, and then taking the furniture. Weisz himself takes on the same patriarchal role toward his children that his father held before him, as is described in the following quotes. The desk, as a symbol of his authority, plays the most important role of all furniture pieces and other objects in this plotline.

The invasion of the Weisz family’s house, that is, their private space, and the ransacking of their furniture and other belongings adds symbolical depth to the destruction of the family. The parents are taken and eventually killed by the Nazis. Additionally, their privacy and dignity is publicly destroyed, manifested in the destruction and looting of objects that belonged to them. The trauma of losing his parents is thus enforced by this additional destruction. George Weisz knows he cannot bring his parents back from the dead. In compensation, he tries to reinstate their dignity, by bringing back what used to be theirs. Baudrillard’s description of the role of furniture in a house with regard to the family roles matches Krauss’ representation of the fictional Weisz family quite accurately:

Within the private space each piece of furniture in turn, and each room, internalizes its own particular function and takes on the symbolic dignity pertaining to it – then the whole house puts the finishing touch to this integration of interpersonal relationships within the semi-hermetic family-group. (Baudrillard 13)

The desk represents the father, as it is the center piece of his study, at which he works in his field of specialization, history, as an authority. This authority is represented, for example, in the massive size and weight of the desk. The nuclear family, in the privacy and assumed safety of their home, are indeed sealed off from the outside world almost hermetically. The stone breaking their window, thrown in from the outside, is the symbol of the breach of their privacy and of intrusion into their family circle, the latter being subsequently destroyed. George Weisz, in his own life as a family head, tries to reconstruct a semi-hermetic family setting by being an authoritative patriarch, shielding his own children from the outside world, discouraging contact to other people.

Weisz describes that as a boy, he “wanted to be in two places at the same time” (Krauss *Great House* 286). He tells how his father saw in this behavior “the symptoms of a hereditary disease” (ibid.) referring to the symbol of the ‘wandering Jew’, forever searching for a place to fit in. By reading him poems of Judah Halevi<sup>84</sup>, his father has instilled in him a longing for wandering, and for Israel. George Weisz moves to Israel and falls in love with “the only woman I’d ever met who didn’t want to bring the dead back to life” (Krauss *Great House* 284/285), implying that like the Holocaust survivor Lotte, Weisz, too, is a person who cannot and does not want to talk about his past. When he brings his wife to the house he has bought for them, he asks her for one room to be his alone that she is not allowed to enter. He has carefully chosen this room as it is the place where he plans to reassemble his father’s study. His wife does not ask any questions about his request. Like Lotte’s husband Arthur, she plays along when it comes to the rule of silence concerning the past.

The house George Weisz buys in Jerusalem used to belong to an Arab family. The seller tells him how he found the family’s little girl’s doll, “with real hair that she had lovingly braided. For some time I kept it but one day the glass eyes began to look at me in a strange way” (Krauss *Great House* 285). This passage about a minor symbolic object, a doll, indirectly reflects the injustice done to Arabic families who were driven from their properties once the Israelis had founded their state and won their first war, after being attacked by several Arab nations. The seller clearly suffers from a guilty conscience, represented by his anthropomorphizing the doll, an object that witnessed the Arab family being driven from and his taking possession of the house. The Arab family was intruded upon like the Weisz family. This is not further commented upon in the novel. The parallelism of a private family home being intruded and personal objects being left behind, however, ac-

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84 A travelling Sephardic poet and philosopher from the 11/12th century, whose most important philosophical work, the *Kuzari*, deals with the presence of god in the land of Israel.

knowledges traumata on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The parallel references to human hair in both episodes, Weisz' Jewish mother's in Hungary and the Arab doll's in Israel, create a subtle connection between the two family's fates.

Weisz' wife dies when their son Yoav is eight and their daughter Leah is seven (Krauss *Great House* 118). Nothing is said about the circumstances of her death. She is described as having 'anchored' her husband (ibid.). Her death causes Weisz to become a wanderer again. He states, "I took my children from city to city" (Krauss *Great House* 286). He keeps his house in Jerusalem, however, in order to complete his furniture re-assemblage there. Wherever they live, he keeps rearranging the furniture in the house over night. The children are taught to get used to waking up in rearranged environments constantly, and "to trust no one but themselves. [...] I [Weisz] taught them that it doesn't matter where you put the table, against which wall you push the bed, so long as you always store the suitcases on top of the closet" (Krauss *Great House* 287). What this actually teaches them is distrust of other people, and a constant flight impulse. Weisz' experiences during the Holocaust have instilled in him the survival instinct of being ready to leave a place at all times, and to never feel too familiar or at home in any one place, as it might be taken away from him again. In teaching his children the same he thinks he teaches them important aspects of survival. In fact, however, he makes a normal life and normal relationships impossible for them. Weisz is a strict father, because he is "[p]aranoid that something might happen to his children" (Krauss *Great House* 120). His power over them is one of authority and one of misguided parental love, blocking their path to a normal life.

Isabel, a young Jewish American woman writing her doctoral thesis on literature in London, narrates the section "Lies Told by Children" in part I of the novel. She meets Yoav, becomes his girlfriend, and experiences George Weisz' power over and negative influence on his children. Details about the Weisz family are revealed in the narration by Isabel. She describes how the family was very rich and their possessions were taken by the Gestapo, and loaded onto the SS "Gold Train" (Krauss *Great House* 114). She also recounts how the neighbors looted the rest, and how Weisz, after the war, personally reclaims, sometimes violently, his possessions from former neighbors and strangers (ibid.).

According to Isabel, the siblings Yoav and Leah are "prisoners of their father's, locked within the walls of their own family" (Krauss *Great House* 113). She learns about their father's trauma, but also exposes him as the tyrant he is. Although he is not to blame for his problems, the severity of passing them on to his children is disclosed in a negative way by Isabel. For example, she describes how Leah, as a child, was afraid her dead grandparents'



blackened faces would pop out of one of the furniture crates that were constantly delivered to their house, and that furniture arriving used to terrify her because of this fantasy (Krauss *Great House* 115). Yoav, at age twelve has a recurring dream in which

his father, his sister, and he lived together on a wooded shore and every night the tide would wash furniture onto the beach, four poster beds and sofas dressed in seaweed. They dragged these under the cover of the trees and assembled them in rooms demarcated by lines their father drew in the forest floor. (Krauss *Great House* 119)

The dream reflects how much their lives are dictated by furniture. It arrives daily, like a flood, and has to be dealt with. Like in real life, the rules of this dream-life are set by the father, represented by the demarcation lines he creates. The toil is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Sisyphus, who, as a punishment for angering the gods, has to complete the same task over and over daily, after having the fruits of his labor destroyed each night. The dream-task under the father's commands represents the futility of the life the family is leading, with no connection to other humans or the ability of any kind of choice with regard to spending one's time.

Weisz does allow his children to represent him on business trips. Leah once accompanies Yoav on such a trip for his father. During this trip, Yoav tells her things about his family, as if being away from his father's house in London enabled him to talk freely (Krauss *Great House* 155). Leaving his father's sphere of influence has a positive effect on him. During this trip, Isabel, as a guest in the house of one of Weisz' clients, discovers a huge storage room full of old furniture. The "shapes of various sizes assembled in long rows, a great melancholy mass that seemed to extend in all directions before dissolving into the far corner of the vaulted hall" (Krauss *Great House* 155) remind her of a photographs she once saw in a history class, "an image of a large group of Jews in Umschlagplatz [sic!], adjacent to the Warsaw Ghetto, all of them crouching or sitting on shapeless bags or on the ground, awaiting deportation to Treblinka" (ibid.). She realizes she makes this mental connection of people and furniture because during that same period of history studies, she "also came across photographs of various synagogues and Jewish warehouses that had been used as depots for the furniture and household items the Gestapo looted from the homes of deported and murdered Jews" (Krauss *Great House* 156). The two photographs, one of humans, one of their possessions, trigger the same emotions in her. They are both symbolic of the Holocaust, one showing the victims, the other showing objects that have 'witnessed' the victims. This passage of the text serves the purpose of explaining George Weisz' trauma and his re-

sulting behavior. It does not, however, justify his actively passing on his trauma to his children.

Isabel meets George Weisz in London once. This meeting is an unpleasant one, as Weisz sees her as an intruder into his nuclear family, interrogates her about her own family, and refuses to acknowledge her relationship with his adult son Yoav. Isabel realizes how little is communicated through words in the family: "There were many things they simply didn't talk about: between them, silence was not so much a form of evasion as a way of solitary people to coexist in a family" (Krauss *Great House* 123). Her own family is the cause of anxiety to Isabel as well, as she is overwhelmed with her studies and feels she is supposed to fulfill her mother's and father's unfulfilled dreams: "I might have packed up and left had I not so dreaded my parents' disappointment. [...] It was my father who had pushed me to apply" (Krauss *Great House* 129). However, she associates her family and her childhood home with as safe environment when she states, "all I longed for was to be home in my childhood bedroom, tucked under my covers with their familiar smell of laundry detergent, listening to my parents murmur down the hall" (Krauss *Great House* 128). This is contrasted with the changing environments and sense of insecurity of Leah and Yoav growing up. "What gives the houses of our childhood such depth and resonance in memory is clearly [the] complex structure of interiority, and the objects within it serve for us as boundary markers of the symbolic configuration known as home" states Baudrillard (14). What he postulates here holds true for the case of Isabel and also George Weisz. For Leah and Yoav, however, their childhood never provided the safe haven of a permanent family home. By obsessively focusing on the reconstruction of a childhood memory, George Weisz disregards the present and puts the future of his children at stake. This 'living in the past' is a defining aspect of a trauma not 'worked through'. Weisz passes his trauma on to his children, in the form of communicative memory, leading to them experiencing the negative effects of what Hirsch calls postmemory, as he deprives them of a feeling of safety necessary to live an anxiety-free life. The anxiety of having lost family members, and of not having a 'home' anymore, on a greater scale, represents the status of Jews driven into exile after World War II. Indirectly, thus, the issue of Israel as a universal Jewish homeland is addressed in this discussion of safe space.

As a mediator between the Weisz' story and the readers of the novel, in the narration "Lies Told By Children" in part I, Isabel makes important connections between 'houses' and 'minds' when she recounts visits to Freud's home in London turned into a museum, in which "the visitor is encouraged not only to consider her tour as one through an actual house, but also, [...], as a tour through that metaphorical house, the mind" (Krauss *Great House* 111). Through Isabel the readers are pointed toward the idea that Freud,

“who shed more light than anyone onto the crippling burden of memory, had been unable to resist its mythic spell any better than the rest of us” (ibid.). What she refers to is the fact that Freud had his furniture and belongings shipped from Vienna and had his study reassembled in London in great detail. This is mirrored in Weisz’ efforts to reassemble his father’s study. It is a ‘crippling burden’ indeed, as it takes up all his time and energy, leaving no time to truly live. The Freudian idea of the house as a symbol of the mind is represented in Weisz’ thoughts on a Jerusalem of the mind, as well. The approach of the essence of Judaism as a compilation of Jewish memory, rather than as an actual compilation of material objects in a Temple is what finally frees Weisz from his compulsive drive to collect. Although he has drawn the analogy of the house and the mind for Arthur, it takes him some time to realize that it describes his own situation. This realization hits him when he finds out he cannot have the desk.

The only thing keeping Weisz from death is not having found the desk. He is a (re-)collector of his family’s furniture, and the final piece of his collection is missing. In this he is haunted by the recollection of family memory. About final pieces in collections, specifically, Baudrillard writes:

The absent final term [i.e. object in a collection] is a symbolic distillation of that series without which it would not exist; consequently it acquires a strange quality, [...] which is the quintessence of the whole quantitative calibration of the series. This term is the unique object, defined by its final position and hence creating the illusion that it embodies a particular goal or end. (98)

Leah withholding the desk from her father, after acquiring it under the false identity of Daniel Varsky’s daughter, is intended as a punishment for her father for having made his children live a life of hardship. She denies him the satisfaction of the ‘goal or end’ of his ‘collection’. Weisz, however, sees this denial as a “solution” to his situation (Krauss *Great House* 288). He realizes that obtaining the final piece cannot bring him peace and discovers his previous striving as an ‘illusion’ in the sense of Baudrillard. It is pointed out by Baudrillard that, in the eyes of the collector, “the object attains exceptional value only by virtue of its absence” (98). In Weisz’ case, the desk is not ‘absent’, but unattainable, which amounts to the same outcome.

After finding out where the desk is stored, Weisz pays a substantial bribe to be allowed to sit at it for an hour one last time: “For an instant I almost believed I would find my father stooped over the desk, his pen moving across the page,” he states, “[b]ut the tremendous desk stood alone, mute and uncomprehending” (Krauss *Great House* 289). Seeing the desk again is loaded with anticipation but ends up being an anti-climactic experience for Weisz: “How often I had witnessed it in others, and yet now it almost surprised me: the disappointment, then the relief of something at last sinking

away" (ibid.). His realization about the desk is the same that he has explained to Arthur about Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Messiah: they can be viewed as ideas, not to be reconstructed, or awaited in materialistic terms or in the flesh, but to be re-constructed in the mind, through memory. He realizes that re-assembling his father's study, the task he has set his entire life on, is not meaningful in a material sense, but as an idea of keeping his father's memory. Therefore, he is content with sitting at the desk for a limited amount of time. The need to possess it has subsided. Leah's intervention has set him free to die in peace. "*One cannot but wonder whether collections are in fact meant to be completed,*" writes Baudrillard, "whether lack does not play an essential part here – a positive one, moreover, as the means whereby the subject reapprehends his own objectivity" (99, his italics). Having figured out that he does not need to possess the desk, Weisz feels free to let go of his life and commits suicide.

His children should be free to live their own lives and make their own decisions after George Weisz has committed suicide. However, his death has the opposite effect; they withdraw even more from life. They move to Israel and abolish all contact to Isabel. It takes six years until Isabel hears from Leah through a letter, asking her for help. Leah begs her to save her brother Yoav from suicide. She writes that after their father had killed himself, they were unable to even leave the house in Jerusalem, and were drawn closer to suicide daily. As Leah writes, "*It can't go on like this or we really will stop living. One of us will do something terrible. It's as if my father is luring us closer to him every day. It gets harder to resist*" (Krauss *Great House* 116, her italics). Leaving the house, to them, has taken on a metaphorical meaning of leaving the family. Their situation as siblings living in a deteriorating house, being besieged by death, calling a friend for help, resounds strongly of Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" in its gothic horror-like implications and its house/family duality. The deteriorating house in Jerusalem is in danger of collapsing over the living, in a literal sense. The remaining two members of the Weisz family are in mortal danger by the condition of the house and by their father's mental power over them, from beyond the grave. If they died that would end the 'house', that is, the family line. It is, therefore, important for them to leave the house, the material building, in order to save the line of their house, that is, their lives.

In her letter to Isabel, Leah describes how she realized that her father worked on reassembling her grandfather's study "[a]s if by putting all the pieces back together he might collapse time and erase regret" (Krauss *Great House* 114). This idea of the wish to 'collapse time' matches what Baudrillard writes of old furniture: "The Antique is always, in the strongest sense of the term, a 'family portrait': the immemorialization, in the concrete form of an object, of a former being – a procedure equivalent, in the register of the

imaginary, to a suppression of time" (78). 'Suppression of time' as a way of 'acting out' his trauma-experience is what Weisz has set out to accomplish in his collection, as Leah realizes. Her reaction of keeping the desk from her father may appear stubborn. For Leah, however, it is a life-assuring statement. She refuses to give in to and be part of his futile endeavor. To her, her father's occupation means living in death's shadow. She frees herself from his trauma-influenced approach to life. She writes to Isabel: "*That I refused to hand it [the desk] over to him was what tore our family apart in the year when you lived with us*" (Krauss *Great House* 114). By withholding the desk from her father she thinks she has killed him, but then realizes that "[...] *father had won. That at last he'd found a way to make it impossible for us to ever escape him. After he died, we went home to the house in Jerusalem. And we stopped living*" (ibid.). The text represents George Weisz' suicide as his reaction to catharsis. His children, however, in addition to having 'inherited' his trauma, now have to bear the feeling of guilt about his suicide. Weisz leaves them a letter explaining his actions. In his death, however, he has deprived them of the opportunity of personal communication which cannot be replaced by one-sided explanations on his part. For them, his realization that the material world is in effect powerless, that the immaterial, especially memory, holds true power over people, is a source of renewed anxiety. They fear that with their father's death, his influence over them will remain, even without him being bodily present. What Leah and Yoav experience is the form of unarticulated transgenerational trauma passed on from parents to children termed 'memoria negativa' by Assmann.

Leah taking up the courage to keep the desk from her father, and later to leave the house in Jerusalem and to ask Isabel for help is what saves the siblings and starts them on the path to self-determined lives. The desk as an object has lost all meaning in the end. Yoav and Isabel have a chance of breaking the cycle of trauma and not passing it on to their child, which is symbolized by them leaving the house and furniture in Jerusalem behind. The text's ending shows how an intra-familial transgenerational passing on of trauma can be interrupted. In Leah and Yoav's struggle, it stresses the effort and time that overcoming inherited trauma takes. After receiving this cry for help, although six years have passed, Isabel re-engages in a relationship with Yoav, returning to Israel from New York. This gives the text a life-assuring and positive end note. It represents that following generations, although strongly influenced by their parents' trauma, are able to overcome it.

#### 4.4.2 An Israeli Family and War Trauma

The inner monologue of a father, Aaron, confessing his harsh treatment of one of his sons, Dov, constitutes the second plotline of *Great House* mainly concerned with family, “True Kindness”. His narration is addressed to his son Dov, with whom he holds imaginary conversations. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to his father, Dov has tried to commit suicide and is lying in a hospital. This narration is only indirectly connected to the desk. It contains other, minor objects of symbolic importance to the narrative. The plotline mirrors the narrative of George Weisz’ family closely in its theme of unexpressed and misguided fatherly love. It is a narrative representing issues about family life and identity in Israel, a new thematic direction in Krauss’ work.

The narrative’s title, ‘True Kindness’, is a reference to an Israeli volunteer first aid organization also known as ZAKA, specialized in identifying disaster victims, such as victims of suicide bombings, and attending to all bodily parts being collected and prepared for burial according to Jewish religious tradition<sup>85</sup>. It consists mostly of Jewish Orthodox members and recovers all bodies, also those of the perpetrator/s, in the event of a terrorist attack, for example. The name ‘True Kindness’ derives from the fact that the dead cannot thank for or return the favor done them by the service. The title may refer to the care that is taken of Dov after he has an accident, but also to the father’s ‘kind’ feelings toward his son, which he hides behind tyrannical behavior.

Aaron ‘confesses’ to his absent son that ever since he, Dov, has left for England, Aaron has had imaginary conversations with him, about work and about private matters. An especially grueling memory about one of the number 18 bus bombings in Jerusalem, the ZAKA having to scrape body parts off walls and trees afterward, is something he has nightmares about and can talk to no one about, except for his imaginary conversations with his son Dov (Krauss *Great House* 197).

Aaron and Eve, both Israeli, have two children, Uri and Dov (no family name given). While Uri appears to be his father’s favorite, with an outgoing personality and a positive approach to life, Dov is a withdrawn and difficult child. His mother, Eve, shelters and defends Dov, and his father, Aaron, constantly criticizes and reproaches him. The resemblance to Torah stories about preferred sons, from Abel, preferred over Cain, to Isaac being preferred over Ishmael, to Jacob being preferred over his eleven other brothers and one sister, resounds in this narrative. The narrative shows, however, that Dov is equally loved by his father, who simply has problems displaying this love, and understanding his son’s personality.

85    Abbreviated, Hebrew: Zihuy Korbanot Ason, English: disaster victim identification, cf.: [www.zaka.us](http://www.zaka.us). See also Krauss *Great House* 198.

Aaron, the father, bears the name of a second son himself. His name is that of the first high priest of Judaism and the younger brother of Moses. Despite the religious implication of his name, Aaron is not a religious man. Jewish identity in this narrative is drawn from being in the land, Israel, not from religious beliefs. Aaron is a Zionist who entered the country aged five (Krauss *Great House* 49), and has fought for Israel in the 1948 and Suez (in 1956, cf. Tessler 336 ff.) wars. This gives the narrative a rough time frame. He states he grew up in a *kibbutz* (Krauss *Great House* 51). His wife, Eve, is also described as participating in Zionist activities, such as helping out at the local WIZO<sup>86</sup>.

While Uri is described as the son who enjoys the outings the brothers go on with their father, like trips to the local *shuk*, the market, Dov, the younger son, is difficult to please as a child. As an adult, he leaves Israel after his war trauma attained in the Yom Kippur War, while Uri, unscathed by the war, is the one who stays and who takes care of his elderly parents. Dov wants to be a writer, an idea which his father dislikes. This intra-familial relationship of Dov and his father has already been analyzed in the chapter on writing and writers. Dov ends up studying law, like his father, eventually becoming a judge. Leaving Israel, and his family, is a step his father finds unforgivable. As a man in his later forties, Dov comes home to Jerusalem for the funeral of his mother, who has died of cancer. He also returns to Israel, having quit his position as a judge in London, to negotiate his relationship with his father, and eventually, to commit suicide. His effort to be killed in a random accident ties the narrative strand of Nadia, the writer from New York, to his.

Aaron's family first lives in Beit Hakarem, Jerusalem, and later moves to Beit<sup>87</sup> Zayit, a *moshav*, or town, west of Jerusalem. When Dov comes back home for his mother's funeral, Aaron reflects on this family home:

We stood in the hall of the house that had once been all of our house, a house that had been filled with life, every last room of it brimming with laughter, arguments, tears, dust, the smell of food, pain, desire, anger, and silence, too, the tightly coiled silence of people pressed up against each other in what is called a family. (Krauss *Great House* 68)

In this passage, the house comes to stand for all the positive and negative memory that accompanies the life of a family together. The emotions Aaron lists drift from positive ones toward the negative, as the aspect of Dov's 'difference', especially after his war experience, has made the family drift apart. The mother's death, finally, seen by Aaron as 'abandonment' on her part,

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86 Women's International Zionist Organization, cf. [www.wizo.org](http://www.wizo.org)

87 Beit is Hebrew for 'house'.



forces the remaining family members back together for the funeral, but communication is hardly possible at all between Aaron and Dov. The house, except for this passage, is only mentioned by Aaron in passing. What is important to him is that this family house is in *Israel*, a privilege he has fought for in two wars that his sons will have to go to war for, as well. The reason for his parents coming to Israel is given in one word: pogroms. They left their native country because they were unwelcome and in mortal danger there. This explains Aaron's will to remain in Israel, and, if necessary to fight for the country. The fact that times have changed, and that there are many countries in the world that Jews have chosen to settle in, the aspect realized by Weisz that Israel can be an idea, eludes Aaron. To him, 'Israel is real'<sup>88</sup>, not simply an idea. This is reminiscent of Berel Lang naming the foundation of Israel as one of the two events of importance to Jewish collective identity, the other being the Holocaust.

The family has always been divided on where to live. After the Suez War, Eve tells her husband: "I want to leave, [...]. I won't send them into war," (Krauss *Great House* 48) referring to their two young boys, who would eventually have to join the Israeli army, and, possibly go into battle for their country at some point. Aaron, in the privacy of his 'confession', relates the story of finding a comrade's severed hand during the Suez War. He comments: "Did I have nightmares afterwards? Did I scream out in the night? Pass over it. What's the use of going into these things?" (Krauss *Great House* 49). Although he is trying to downplay his problems—he clearly displays signs of war trauma—and although his wife urges him to move to London, Aaron refuses to leave Israel. "I would not leave. My sons would grow up in Israeli sunshine, eating Israeli fruit, playing under Israeli trees, with the dirt of their forefathers under their nails, fighting if necessary. Your mother knew all this from the beginning" (ibid.). His wife does not have a say in this decision, and he exerts physical power over her on conferring his opinion, "[...] grabbing her wrists" (ibid.), admitting that he is "a man who relies on volume to make [himself] understood" (Krauss *Great House* 50). He refers to himself in terms like "monster" and an "arrogant, obtuse asshole" throughout his narration (e.g. Krauss *Great House* 174). It is obvious, however, that he truly loves his wife and sons and is deeply concerned for their well-being. His roughness is a façade, as he himself admits, to shelter himself from being overwhelmed by feelings. His sons pay the price for Aaron's decision to stay in Israel when they have to fight in the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. Aaron drives his son Dov to the meeting point remarking,

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88 *Israel is Real* is the title of a book by Rich Cohen, which Krauss has acknowledged as source for her account of the story of Yochanan ben Zakkai in *Great House*. The book's subtitle is: *An Obsessive Quest to Understand the Jewish Nation and its History*.



not without fear for him: "A soldier, Dova'leh. My boy had grown up to be a soldier, and I was delivering him to war" (Krauss *Great House* 184). When Dov returns after being wounded, Aaron states, "you were neither the soldier I had watched disappear into the crowd, nor the boy I knew. You were a kind of shell, emptied out of both those people" (Krauss *Great House* 186). Dov is traumatized after watching comrades die, unable to help them and is reproached by a dead soldier's parents for not having remained with their dying son. In the family there is the unspoken accusation of the mother, Eve, that, had they left the country earlier, her sons would have been spared the (potentially) traumatic experience of war. Aaron cannot speak to his son, but, embracing him and feeling his hostility, deliberates what he would have said: "*I am not the enemy. [...] I would rather a thousand died instead of you*" (Krauss *Great House* 191, her italics).

When his wife is in hospital with terminal cancer, Aaron is confronted with death and loss, again. In the waiting room of the hospital, there is a painting which he contemplates daily and which, thus, takes on symbolic value for him: "I knew every inch of it. [...] I decided that when I left that room for the last time I would take it off the wall and carry it away with me" (Krauss *Great House* 52). As there is no person to talk to about his feelings, he addresses the painting: "I had begged it, reasoned with it, argued with it, cursed it, I had gone into it, I had bored my way into that incompetent valley and by and by it had come to mean something to me" (Krauss *Great House* 53). The meaning of the painting is that of a listener, and that of an offer of escape. 'Going' into the landscape of the painting is the only thing Aaron can do while waiting for the inevitable death of his wife. He is at a loss about dealing with death, as the Jewish religion is not very specific on it: "[A]sk a Jew what happens when he dies and you'll see the miserable condition of a man left alone to grapple. A man lost and confused. Wandering blindly" (Krauss *Great House* 174). He muses that while Buddhists and Christians have set beliefs about the afterlife, Jews do not.

What is the point of a religion that turns its back on the subject of what happens when life ends? Having been denied an answer [...] while at the same time being cursed as a people who for thousands of years have aroused in others murderous hate—the Jew has no choice but to live with death every day. [...] to set up his house in its shadow, and never to discuss the terms. (Krauss *Great House* 175)

Aaron has set up his house 'in death's shadow' by choosing to live in Israel, especially near Jerusalem, with all its implications of a divided city. He is deeply troubled by what he sees as the fate of Jews, being confronted with hatred wherever they go. This is partly a view of the past, of the times of massive

pogroms, yet anti-Semitism is a topic in many countries today and in some even on the rise again, as touched upon in my introductory chapter.

His reflections on death trigger memory of his parents in Aaron, and of their deaths (Krauss *Great House* 193). He recalls how his mother died before his father and how it took his father a year to get over it. Other recollections include how he, Aaron, used to light the *yahrzeit* candle<sup>89</sup> for them both but then abandoned the habit. He also remembers that he did not speak of personal things with his father and did not know his take on the afterlife (Krauss *Great House* 194). The *yahrzeit* candle, a symbolic Jewish object in memory of the dead, does not carry a deeper meaning for Aaron. Neither does a gravesite. “The dead are dead, if I want to visit them I have my memories, this is how I look at it, if I look at it at all” says Aaron (Krauss *Great House* 194). In contrast to this statement, however, he reflects how he wishes Dov to come and visit *his* grave once he is dead, and for him to leave a stone, as is done according to Jewish custom. “The stone that can mean so many things to a Jew, but in your [Dov’s] hand could only mean one” (Krauss *Great House* 196). Aaron is referring to the fact that in the Torah, a stone slung by David killed the enemy Goliath, while stones in recent times are thrown against Jewish settlers or military by Palestinians in confrontational situations. In Dov’s hands, finally, a stone can only mean commemoration of his father.

Aaron sees himself confronted with death after his wife dies and he realizes his own age and his mortality. At his wife’s shiva, he is overwhelmed by what he calls “either the shallowness of their mourning or the depth of it” (Krauss *Great House* 54), and hides from the gathered family and friends. He likens himself to the *afikomen*, the piece of bread that is hidden on Passover, which the family members ritually search for (Krauss *Great House* 55). While hiding from his family, he remembers his cruel measures of ‘education’ while hearing Dov call his name. In order to ‘teach’ Dov a lesson on ‘how much he needed his father’, he took him hiking in the desert at the age of ten and hid from him:

Guess what, my boy. I was there the whole time! Crouched behind a rock, a few meters up the cliff. That’s right, while you called, while you screamed out for me, believing yourself to be abandoned in the desert, I hid behind a rock patiently watching, like the ram that saved Isaac. I was Abraham *and* the ram. (ibid., her italics)

Aaron, in this cruel ‘game’, tries to elicit from his son the notion that he needs his father. It also reveals symbolically that Aaron is ready to ‘sacrifice’

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89 A candle lit on the anniversary of a family member’s death in Judaism, a Yiddish term.

his sons not for a god, but for the sake of the country he chooses to live in. The quote sounds rather as if he sees himself as a god-like figure, reigning over and judging his family. It is only one of many confessions of cruelty he makes, mostly concerning his treatment of Dov. These memories of his children when they were younger are painful to Aaron:

There is a fallacy that the powerful emotion of youth mellows with time. Not true. One learns to control and suppress it. But it doesn't lessen. It simply hides and concentrates itself in more discreet places. When one accidentally stumbles into one of these abysses, the pain is spectacular. I find these little abysses everywhere now. (Krauss *Great House* 55)

These 'painful abysses' bespeak of a guilty conscience about Aaron's treatment of his younger son. He slowly comes to the realization that his behavior was wrong. His hardened stance is connected to his own upbringing and his war experience. He calls Israel a "country where death overlaps life" (Krauss *Great House* 58), for example. When Dov displays behavioral problems as a very young child, while Eve consults a psychologist, Aaron loses his temper with his son:

When I was your age, I shouted, shaking you so hard your head wobbled sickeningly on your neck, there was nothing to eat, and no money for toys, the house was always cold, but we went outside and played and made games out of nothing and lived because we had our lives, while the others were being murdered in the pogroms [...]. (Krauss *Great House* 73)

Reproaching his son, who, in his eyes has "everything in the world" (ibid.) and does not appreciate it, he nevertheless sees himself in his son's eyes, reflected literally (ibid.), and mirrored metaphorically. In his anger, Aaron reveals a lot about himself. Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, in the introduction to the essay collection *Wrestling with Zion* (1), address the many implications about the conflict regarding the country of Israel, which are reflected partly in Aaron's rant:

The tragic dimension and persistence of this struggle are fed by many sources: the strategic value of the terrain; clashing theologies and nationalist aspirations; [...]; the genocidal legacies of colonialism and Holocaust, racism and anti-Semitism; [...]. And, to borrow from Walter Benjamin, driving on both sides there is the hope for a better future for grandchildren and perhaps even more potent, the memory of murdered ancestors.

Aaron mentioning pogroms as the cause of his parents' immigration to Israel points toward his family coming from Eastern Europe and leaving before World War II. That also means he came to Israel with one of the early

bigger waves of settlers, finding no infrastructure and being confronted with a war as soon as statehood was declared. His life of hardship has left no room to be emotional and sensitive and he has no understanding of his son being different than him. Although his son, theoretically, has 'everything', the most important thing is lacking: unconditional parental love and support. The oppressive family climate makes his childhood a source of anxiety for Dov which is worsened by his traumatic war experiences later in life. His leaving Israel is the only logical thing for him to do in order to escape his oppressive father and the oppressive Israeli-Arab conflict.

At the end of the narration, Aaron has a sudden premonition of Dov's suicide attempt: "Suddenly I'm frightened, Dov. I feel a shiver, a coldness is seeping into my veins. For once I think I understand. [...]. Is it possible you've come to say goodbye again? That you intend to put an end—at last? Wait, Dovik. Don't go" (Krauss *Great House* 198). He concludes that he, as a non-religious man, will pray for Dov's safety and search for him: "I'll do what your mother would have done. I'll call every hospital" (ibid.). The situation of Aaron desperately searching for his son mirrors the episode in the desert in which he made his son search for him. It makes clear to Aaron the absolute cruelty of his actions. His open admission that he loves his son and does not want him to 'go' comes very late in his life. Throughout Aaron's confession, however, there are signs of fatherly love and tenderness, such as the many endearing nicknames he gives his son. His recollection of the day of Dov's birth and the love he felt prove all his tyrannical behavior a façade: "I thought I would explode from it all, from love and regret, Dov, love and regret as I never thought possible. In that instant I understood with surprise that I had become your father" (Krauss *Great House* 197).

In representing two overbearing father figures, George Weisz and Aaron, in *Great House*, Krauss breaks with the (literary) stereotype of the Jewish mother smothering her children. These two patriarchal figures display cruelty ensuing from love and fear and growing up in uncertainty and war themselves. The power these fathers hold over their children is an involuntarily destructive force which results in suicide in Weisz' case and attempted suicide in Dov's. In both narrations, the children have to defy their fathers in order to have a chance at living their lives.

Both fathers are represented as cruel and loving at the same time, and as victims of circumstances tied to their Jewish identity. In Weisz' case, the Holocaust has obstructed all normal interaction, while in Aaron's case, the violence connected to survival as a Jew in his native country and in Israel has hardened him. In Weisz' case, the desk, an object, symbolizes his struggle with traumatic memory, while in Aaron's case, the land, Israel, is the ultimate symbol of his own struggle, and the Jewish struggle for survival throughout history. The text implies that in Weisz' and Aaron's generation,

for many coming to Israel was a choice of life and death, while following generations of Jews have a choice of finding peaceful living conditions elsewhere.

Both narrations are open ended. There is the notion of hope that the children, the second generation, have a chance of leading 'normal' lives at some point. It is clear that this will take a process of their 'working through' their inherited, transgenerational traumata, or 'memoria negativa'. Nadia *can* start leading a life without the desk, Dov *can* survive his suicide attempt and make peace with his father, and Isabel and Yoav have a child of their own and *can* start a life together, in the present. In these options, the text, although giving off very harsh representations of Jewish lives overshadowed by trauma and war, leaves an opportunity for positivity and hope.

## 5 Conclusion

Third generation Jewish American literature has been experiencing an unprecedented amount of output and institutionalized support since the time around the millennial turn. This work shows how contemporary Jewish American literature stands in the tradition of a rich Jewish American literary heritage. Exemplary cultural and literary analysis of the third generation Jewish American novels *Everything is Illuminated* and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer, *Hope: A Tragedy* by Shalom Auslander, and *The History of Love* and *Great House* by Nicole Krauss inquire into themes represented by this contemporary writer generation in their particular niche as a small but prolific cultural minority. Analysis presents *memory* as the central underlying topic of these works. As I was able to show, memory in third generation Jewish American fiction is represented in the form of three main themes: the Holocaust, writing and writers, and the family. These three themes, in turn, are depicted in the novels through *symbolic characters* and *symbolic objects*. The symbolic characters, in reference to the themes, are labeled *ghosts*, *writers*, and *family members*. The symbolic objects discovered refer to these three themes, as well.

A survey of memory theory has established that human memory in its various forms and functions is a construct, tied to human identity. The main memory categories to be differentiated, as stated by Aleida Assmann and other memory scholars, *active* and *passive* memory, *episodic* and *semantic* memory, *embodied* and *disembodied* memory and *individual* and *collective* memory, all form aspects of human identity and are represented in various ways in the novels analyzed. Holocaust memory is mostly depicted in the form of the specific memory category of (psychological) *trauma*. As an experience that is re-lived again and again, traumatic memory often renders survivor-sufferers incapable of mentally leaving their past in which the trauma occurred (cf. Patrick Duggan). 'Acting out' and 'working through', as first formulated by Sigmund Freud and taken up by Dominick LaCapra, are two different stages in survivor-sufferers' processes of dealing with trauma. Before going into detail concerning third generation Jewish American writing with regard to representation of Holocaust trauma and the other two major themes of writing and the family, this work discussed two important theoretical issues with regard to Holocaust trauma: the question of representability of the Holocaust (cf. Jean-François Lyotard) and the aspect of power struggles in (cultural) memory (cf. Raymond Williams).

Third generation Jewish American writers are twice removed from the eye-witness generation. It was shown that theirs is a decisive role in the transmission of Holocaust memory. In their fiction, they will help keep Holocaust memory alive after the eye-witness generation is gone. The eye-wit-

nesses alive today were children when they experienced the Holocaust, and are now in old age. Third generation writers still have the chance to be witness-witnesses ("Zeugen-Zeugen"), a term by Sergey Lagondinsky and Sven-Christian Kindler. They are also the writer generation, however, to experience the paradigm shift in Holocaust memory transmission from a society with eye-witnesses to one without them. On the one hand, if there is no continuity of writing about the Holocaust, there is the danger of its memory falling into forgetfulness. On the other hand, the dangers of misrepresenting the Holocaust, for example by creating what Eva Hoffman calls 'hypermemory', increase naturally with the increasing distance of the following generations from the eye-witness generation. These two extremes call for continued Holocaust commemoration in all possible forms, including fiction, in a conscientious way, concerned with authenticity and awareness of original events and locale.

*Jewish* themes, from a specifically Jewish perspective, are the center of my analysis. However, the authors whose texts are discussed are *Jewish Americans*. This leads to the question of whether Americans are appropriating a European event in writing about the Holocaust. As Aleida Assmann and others show, the Holocaust has long left the container of its original space (cf. Assmann/Conrad). With Jews living in the Diaspora all over the world, as a direct result of the Holocaust, of course its memory has travelled with them. The texts analyzed represent the Holocaust as a European event, some are set partly at original locations, such as Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*. The spatiotemporal removal from the original event represented from specifically *Jewish American*, and third generation perspectives adds necessary contemporary aspects to Holocaust representation.

The power struggles of memory become apparent in the issues discussed above. The dynamic interrelations of cultural processes, the topicality stages of which Raymond Williams expressed in the terms *residual*, *dominant*, and *emergent*, represent the complexity of culture and its transitional nature in its variable elements, of which memory clearly is one. The Holocaust as a memory, in its struggle between being remembered or forgotten, appropriated, misrepresented, or portrayed authentically, has to be renegotiated constantly by every new generation. In its spatiotemporal removal, the Holocaust has entered a phase of being a residual aspect of dominant Western memory culture, in the sense of Raymond Williams. Other, dominant and emergent, topics of Jewish American interest are represented in complementary plotlines of equal importance in the novels by Nicole Krauss.

Holocaust trauma is the trauma represented most often in Jewish American third generation literature. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, further trauma events, such as the World War II Dresden and Hiroshima bombings, and New York September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attacks

are represented. *Hope: A Tragedy* makes brief reference to the Balkan War of the 1990s, and *Great House* represents a Chilean Pinochet regime victim and the Israeli-Arab War of 1948, the Suez War, and the Yom Kippur War. How third generation Jewish American writers are able to represent the Holocaust and other (war) trauma events, as something they have not witnessed themselves, has been analyzed in this work: Their literature represents Holocaust memory as one of three main themes. As shown, they make use of what Linda Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction' in their depiction of the Holocaust, for example. As exemplified in the first theme, in symbolic (Holocaust) ghost characters such as fictitious survivor-Anne Frank in Auslander's *Hope: A Tragedy* and Leo/Bruno in Krauss' *The History of Love* as a reminiscence of the writer Bruno Schulz, the texts create fictional intertextual (cf. Manfred Pfister/ Gérard Genette) references to historical figures who became victims of the Holocaust. Stylistic means such as literal and narrative blanks (cf. Wolfgang Iser) in a text, as techniques employed by third generation Jewish American writers, mirror the suppression of their characters' traumata in their fiction. The stylistic devices of absence of words, of absence of characters, or the authors leaving spaces in a text are representative of absent, because suppressed, memory, and absent people, who were murdered by the Nazis. They can be embedded further in intertextual references to eye-witness accounts and previous Holocaust literature, in order to maintain authentic representations, as is done by the texts analyzed.

The following recurring traits were identified as pertaining to the representation of symbolic (Holocaust) ghost characters: These symbolic characters are mostly elderly first generation survivors dwelling in remote or isolated places, and avoiding human contact. They are often hoarders of objects, and seem to be living in the past, due to their traumatization. They often have trouble communicating, even with their spouses, as exemplified in Grandmother and Thomas Schell Sr. in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and in Lotte Berg and her husband Arthur Bender in *Great House*. Some occur like living monuments themselves, functioning as memory storage media, like Lista in *Everything is Illuminated*. As a collector of objects owned by the murdered Jewish citizens of Trachimbrod, she is the only eye-witness left to know who these objects used to belong to, and how the original owners, her family members and friends, were murdered in the Holocaust. The knowledge of what these objects represent has been passed on to witness-witnesses Alex and Jonathan of generation three. Yet, Lista cannot leave her post as a living monument with her object collection. Like Lista, survivor-Anne Frank in *Hope: A Tragedy* 'survives' the novel's ending. Symbolizing suppressed Holocaust memory, she appears to be an 'immortal' ghost, bound to re-appear in ever new peoples' attics, that is, in peoples' (subconscious) minds.



Grandmother and Thomas Schell Sr. of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* remain at a New York airport, suspended in time, “not coming or going” (Krauss *History* 312), not able to work through their respective, deep traumata from WW II experience of losing loved ones in the bombing of Dresden and re-traumatization through the September 11, 2001 New York World Trade Center attacks, in which they lose their son. While Thomas Schell Sr. never regains his ability to communicate properly, Grandmother manages to pass on the message of the importance of communicating *love* to loved ones to her grandson Oskar Schell in a letter.

Occasionally, the symbolic ghost characters are teamed up with another person, such as Grandmother and grandson Oskar Schell mentioned above, or the Grandfather and his grandson Alex in *Everything is Illuminated*. The symbolic ghost characters are searching for catharsis, or deliverance from their trauma, some actively trying to ‘work through’ it, like Leo in *The History of Love*, some only able to ‘act it out’. In these elderly characters, the texts make clear the imminent loss of the Holocaust eye-witness generation to the readers: Of the symbolic ghost characters analyzed, five die or are close to dying at the end of the respective novels. Lotte Berg in *Great House* dies of dementia, unable to ever work through her trauma. As a result of a form of catharsis, two of the represented symbolic ghost characters, Grandfather of *Everything is Illuminated* and George Weisz of *Great House* commit suicide. Grandfather has been able to acknowledge he is a witness, something he had suppressed his whole life. His grandson Alex, having become a *witness-witness*, takes over responsibility for the family and for memory transmission, and leaves grandfather free to end his life. Weisz, at the end of his life, realizes that completing his object collection is an idea that can be accomplished in his *mind* and that he is able to free himself of his obsessive ‘acting out’ of his trauma by embracing death.

Leopold Gursky and his imaginary friend Bruno in *The History of Love* are two aspects of the same symbolic ghost character. As discussed, in Bruno, a historiographic, metafictional character is created in commemoration of historical writer Bruno Schulz, who in reality has been long dead, murdered by a Nazi. Leo, ‘creating’ Bruno in the novel, uses this as a coping strategy for his trauma. He is a ghost character symbol not only representing traumatic Holocaust memory but also hope of overcoming it, as he is able to work through his trauma with the help of his imagination, and in his occupation as a writer. His obituary ends the novel, proposing his death after he has met third generation member Alma Singer, who is enabled to be a witness of his life.

Characters who bear some aspects of symbolic ghost characters, yet do not quite fit the criteria, are the child Oskar Schell in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and the young poet Daniel Varsky in *Great House*. Oskar

Schell is reminiscent of his literary predecessor Oskar Matzerath of Günter Grass' *The Tin Drum*, and he is traumatized by the 9/11 events, specifically his father's death. His ghost-like qualities lie in occasionally displayed wisdom beyond his age. He is, however, on the other hand a child, at the beginning of his life, who will clearly be able to overcome his trauma, as the path of his 'working through' it is begun and well advanced in the novel. Daniel Varsky appears like a ghost in Nadia's memory in *Great House*, symbolized by an object that used to belong to him, a desk. He is not a 'living' ghost-like character, but truly dead, killed at a young age by the Pinochet regime in Chile. In this, he serves as a symbol of yet another kind of suffering, not tied to the previously discussed mainly 'European' traumata (except for the Japanese War trauma). The presence of Daniel Varsky's desk is a symbol of the absence of its owner.

In its function as an *object* symbolic of the Holocaust, the desk in *Great House* is tied to two ghost-like characters. Lotte Berg and George Weisz, fulfill most of the symbolic ghost character traits. The desk represents the silence of survivor-sufferer Lotte in her 'acting out' her traumatic Holocaust experiences, such as having to abandon her parents to escape the Nazis. To Lotte's husband, the desk symbolizes first and foremost, the unknowable horror of the Holocaust in general that he encounters in his wife. George Weisz, in re-collecting his family's furniture, bestows redemptive qualities upon objects. His father's desk in particular, the final missing piece of his collection, is the object symbolizing the loss of his father, his mother, his entire safe childhood, through the Holocaust. By re-obtaining the desk, Weisz hopes to find solace. He ends up being content with the idea of the object's existence.

While objects are represented in all novels analyzed, only in Krauss' *Great House* do they take on symbolic value *surpassing* the symbolism of the novel's characters. Lista, the hoarder of objects in Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, as a symbolic ghost character, is more important than the symbolic objects she collects. With her death, however, the objects she has stored will gain importance as commemorative objects. The desk and objects in general in *Great House* also serve as reminders that they stand for an idea, in their symbolism, which renders the object itself obsolete, once the idea is understood, and passed on. This basically answers Jean Baudrillard's question, asked in *The System of Objects*, of how objects 'speak': They speak through symbolism.

The representations of symbolic ghost characters and the desk as an object symbolic of the Holocaust display a diverse variety of ways of dealing with trauma such as 'working through', 'acting out', and also passing on traumatic memory. Some symbolic characters are fully occupied with themselves in dealing with their traumata, and (unwittingly) pass them on to their

descendents in the form of postmemory (cf. Marianne Hirsch), while others feel compelled to transmit their memory to posterity, to make sure it is not forgotten once they are gone. The texts represent the need for generations after the eye-witnesses to actively seek out eye-witnesses and to become witness-witnesses, as one of many aspects of Holocaust commemoration.

The dominant theme discovered in all works analyzed, as one of the three themes connected to memory, is *writing*. Writing is a medium of memory storage and transmission, used for example, as discussed, for Holocaust commemoration. Although the past is never fully 'knowable' (cf. David Lowenthal), literature helps to commemorate aspects of it. The support Jewish American writers have encountered in recent years by institutions such as universities with special creative writing tracks or specifically Jewish American literature departments and the high number of publications in Jewish American literature (cf. Joshua Lambert) bespeak of an awareness of the importance of (fiction) writing as memory storage in the Jewish American 'community'. Writing, however, has always been a topic in Jewish American literature and in literature, generally. The specific creative self-reflexivity and intertextuality associated with postmodern writing are strong aspects of the contemporary Jewish American fiction analyzed, as my work displays. The importance of intertextual references with regard to authentic representation of the Holocaust by removed generations is only one aspect. Jewish religious and other cultural knowledge have been passed on from generation to generation first orally, then in writing. Writing connects all three themes, as among the writers represented in the novels are ghosts and family members. These *symbolic writer characters* write for different purposes. They try to overcome traumatic experiences, for example. This is the case in first generation symbolic ghost characters who are writers. Writers from the second and third generation search for identity and professional fulfillment in their work.

The writers represented in the novels write letters, such as Alex and Jonathan in *Everything is Illuminated*. Their letters are means of processing their experiences in their attempt to 'illuminate' the past. The protagonist Jonathan is also working on a novel about his experiences, which Alex comments on, trying to smooth over episodes painful to his family. Grandmother and Thomas Schell Sr. in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* are also writing letters, mainly because they are incapable of direct communication with regard to the topic of their traumata. As stated, Thomas Schell Sr. relates his life choices to his son in his letters. They are, however, never sent. Grandmother sends letters to her grandson Oskar. Her being able to reach out to her grandson, if only in the written form, shows slight progress in her 'working through' her trauma. Oskar Schell, in turn, writes a diary in order to be able to cope with his experiences, especially the loss of his father in

the 9/11 attack. Survivor-Anne Frank in *Hope: A Tragedy* is working on her second novel, writing to match the accomplished success of her famous *Diary*. All these forms of writing are life-affirming and transmit important Jewish, American, or Jewish American experiences from person to person, from generation to generation, and from fictitious characters to readers in ways that are very personal, and thereby generators of empathy in their representation of individual fates.

In Nicole Krauss' *The History of Love*, almost all characters are writers of some kind and they are representative of all three generations, young and old, male and female. This diversity is unattained by the other novels analyzed. First generation symbolic ghost and writer character Leo writes two novels. His imaginary friend Bruno is an intertextual reference to historical writer Bruno Schulz, whose manuscript *The Messiah* has been missing since his death, to which an analogy is drawn in Leo's manuscript going 'missing'. Leo's friend Zvi Livinoff, trusted with the manuscript, first hand-copies, then translates, and finally plagiarizes Leo's novel. Second generation character Charlotte Singer translates the book yet again. In these elaborate processes of writing, re-writing, translating, re-translating, and spatiotemporal 'movement' of Leo's book from World War II Europe to millennial New York, the text symbolically represents the (re-)construction of memory, and in this context, of Jewish memory. Third generation characters Alma and Bird Singer, finally, both write diaries in order to cope with the loss of their father, like Oskar Schell in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. While Alma's diary, titled *How to Survive in the Wild*, represents a secular concern with Jewish identity and survival shared by her father, Bird's therapeutic diary written upon suggestion of his psychologist, displays his religious affiliation, for example in his copying god's name onto every page in Hebrew. Like the third generation writers in Foer, Jonathan, Alex, and Oskar, Alma and Bird's writing is concerned with finding their (Jewish) identity, for example in negotiating their parents' and grandparents' lives and identities.

As a *symbolic object* connected to writing and writers, *a desk*, as an instrument facilitating writing, is an obvious choice. The desk tying together the plotlines of *Great House*, takes on different meanings as a symbolic object. It stands symbolic of a life of the mind for Holocaust writer Lotte, and is the only object in her life she attributes meaning to. In giving it away to Daniel Varsky, she shows professional and also personal appreciation of the young poet. The young Israeli Dov writes at a different desk, yet it is also, as Lotte's desk, an object representative of his private and withdrawn nature. The writer Nadia comes to depend on the desk she receives from Daniel Varsky. To her, the desk is an object that represents recognition of her profession as a writer and acknowledges her literary achievement. Possession of the desk links her to the successful poets Lorca and Varsky, implying her

own success and belonging. She anthropomorphizes the desk; it becomes her companion, instead of humans, symbolizing that she has given her entire life to writing.

Negotiations of contemporary Jewish identities, in third generation Jewish American literature, encompass questions of religious versus secular Jewish concepts of living, or discussions of Israel as a Jewish homeland. These latter two important contemporary Jewish American issues are represented, in the literature analyzed, in family constellations, as my work shows. Within these family constellations, memory transmission plays an important role. Many of the represented family constellations raise issues of problematic memory, such as Holocaust and war trauma, loss of loved ones, and communication issues between generations ensuing from this problematic memory.

An *emergent* aspect of family representation in third generation Jewish American fiction is the specific focus on family life and intra-familial relations, as well as the depiction of *symbolic family member characters* not in stereotypes, such as the overbearing Jewish mother, but in authentic characters. In the works analyzed, this is particularly prevalent in Nicole Krauss' writing. As a female author, she writes in the line of an established Jewish *écriture féminine*, with forerunners such as Grace Paley, as Stephen Wade states. While the works of the two male authors Foer and Auslander depict mainly male protagonists, and revert to stereotypical humor, for example in Auslander's representation of the overbearing Jewish mother of Solomon Kugel, Krauss' work contains authentic, young and old, strong male and female, protagonists. Common literary stereotypes such as the Jewish mother dominating her (male) children, or the female Holocaust victim losing her child, are not employed by Krauss, whereas both still make their appearances in Foer and Auslander. Foer and Auslander create strong female first generation characters, but interestingly, no strong female characters of following generations appear in protagonists' roles in their writing to date.

Leo, in Nicole Krauss' *The History of Love*, is depicted not only as a ghost and a writer but also as a symbolic family member character. As in his symbolism as a ghost and a writer, the Holocaust plays a role in his symbolism as a family member in the regard that the Holocaust has destroyed his family life both in the case of his family of origin and his potential family. However, his father has passed Jewish tradition on to him, as exemplified in his rocking back and forth in remembering his father and this traditional Jewish prayer movement. Also, without his son being aware of it, Leo has passed his writing talent on to him. What is passed on from generation to generation within a family is of importance in all novels analyzed. In the third generation family members Alma and Bird in *The History of Love*, their father's legacy takes two different paths, both of which represent Jew-

ish American lifestyles on the rise. While Alma remembers the secular Jewish identity aspects of her father, concerned with the outdoors, and physical survival, representative of a growing number of secular Jews in the U.S., Bird commemorates his father in orthodox Jewish religious practice, a branch of Judaism equally popular in America today.

It is notable that in all novels analyzed, (grand)fathers are the ones passing on memory, knowledge, and skills to their children and grandchildren (with the exception of the stereotypical Jewish mother in *Hope: A Tragedy*). Although traditionally matrilineally oriented, Judaism, especially religious Judaism, places the father in the role of the one to bestow (religious) knowledge and memory on (male) children. Krauss extends this practice to the female child Alma Singer. Of the novels analyzed hers are the only ones specifically addressing Jewish religious practice in various forms, although most of her characters are not represented as religious. She exemplifies how some religious Jewish rituals, for example the Seder dinner, are practiced by non-religious Jews in keeping with tradition, not in religious observation.

*Symbolic objects* such as the desk, but also houses, and minor objects related to Jewish religious practice play important roles in family representation in *Great House*. The fathers George Weisz and Aaron are passing on memory of war traumata to their children Leah and Yoav Weisz, and Dov, in their behavior. The difficulty of overcoming such 'inherited' traumata is represented in the text by showing how they can render the affected person unable to confront the issue alone. Impulses from someone outside the family can be needed to start 'working through' inherited trauma. The house as an object symbolic of the family and as a confined family space is shown to be able to represent both a safe haven of childhood and a prison of negative memory. The house as a symbol of the mind, in this novel, is a symbol of the patriarchal mind in both Weisz' and Aaron's case. The representation of the desk as the ultimate collector's item for Weisz' family-memory reconstruction in *Great House* confirms Baudrillard's interpretation of furniture as a symbol of patriarchal family structures. In Weisz finally understanding the importance of seeing Jewish memory and knowledge as not depending on a certain space, but consisting of the knowledge of a worldwide Jewish memory collective, the desk as a desired object comes to symbolize the futility of tying Jewish identity *only* to a specific space. The importance of Israel as a safe country for Jewish emigrants, especially after World War II, at the same time, is fully acknowledged by the text.

Close analysis of several texts with regard to representation of memory has revealed a variety of symbolic characters and symbolic objects in what I call *Millennial Perspectives* of third generation Jewish American literature. The most attention was paid to symbolic characters and objects in *The History of Love* and *Great House* by Nicole Krauss. Her work best represents all

themes in symbolic characters and objects and does so in a balanced, complementary way. Krauss continues to represent the residual Jewish American theme of the Holocaust and the dominant theme of writers and writing in her work. Breaches of continuity in the representation of the emergent topic of Jewish family members were discovered resulting in less stereotypical representation. Hers is also the most diverse representation of Judaism pertaining to religious orientations and she includes a strong third generation female protagonist.

Krauss is the only one of the three authors to approach, in two of the complementary plotlines in *Great House*, the topic of Israel's meaning to Judaism. In representing Jewish families in the U.S. and in Israel in her works, Krauss creates a comparison of lifestyles and indirectly and subtly comments on the current situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her work is not didactic; it does not contain a specific message with regard to this conflict. In her protagonist Nadia's monologue on a writer's permission to write about anything in *Great House*, moral obligations of the writer are basically negated. Krauss' authentic, and multi-faceted, yet explicitly Jewish approach of the universal topics of memory, love, loss, and hope, avoids taking sides in the conflict. The topic-universality and neutral approach make her texts potential classics of (Jewish American) literature.

In conclusion, it is of utmost importance to me to point out through this work that, although Holocaust eye-witnesses are disappearing, neither is their *memory* nor Jewish *culture* in its many forms. Quite the opposite, both are thriving, and one of the reasons for this is the fiction written by third generation Jewish American authors around the millennium. As the Holocaust eye-witness generation dwindles, human witness-witnesses and objects as witness-witnesses become more important. At the point, over time, when even objects as witnesses have faded or disintegrated, the *idea* they represented will still be present, because it is stored and passed on in literature.

Every subsequent generation will be confronted with the issue of memory transmission again, as the removal from the original event of the Holocaust becomes greater and greater, which is accompanied by a growing danger of the extremes of hypermemory or its opposite, oblivion. These two dangers must be carefully negotiated by every new generation of Jewish American writers. Museums, monuments, eye-witness accounts, and photographic and filmic documentation are extremely important in Holocaust memory transmission. Fiction needs to be continued as one of many aspects that help to keep Holocaust memory alive. At the same time, Jewish life must be perceived and accepted as normal again, in the cultures that tried to extinguish it. Anti-Semitic incidents in parts of Europe and the U.S. prove the importance of keeping Holocaust memory alive. Equally, repre-



sentation of 'normal' Jewish life, which can expand gentiles' knowledge of Judaism in all its various facets, is necessary to counter old and dangerous stereotypes about Judaism.

I am convinced of the important role of contemporary Jewish American literature, not only in Holocaust memory transmission, but in representing authentic Jewish identity and culture in all its varieties. Jews in Europe, apart from a few big cities, are, to put it hyperbolically, rare curiosities if distinguishable by Orthodox attire in public, for example. For safety's sake, seventy years after the Holocaust, European Jews choose a life in semi-visibility, with synagogues needing twenty-four hour protection. 'Normal' Jewish life, as represented in third generation Jewish American fiction, is still redeveloping in millennial Europe. As the original site of the Holocaust, Europe has the opportunity to re-learn its own Jewish heritage. Not to do so would be a cultural loss. The U.S., with its uninterrupted tradition of Jewish culture from its foundation to today can serve as a model.

Third generation Jewish American writers are now standing at the *beginning* of experiencing the momentum of the impending paradigm shift in Holocaust remembrance through the loss of the eye-witness generation. The development of this shift's representation in fiction is an important subject to be followed up on by research. Equally, the emergent theme of the family, as a topic that will gain importance in representation, is to be observed further. With peace as a topic of universal interest, finally, I am confident that differentiated representation of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace process will increase with a potential to rise to the status of a dominant topic in new generational Jewish American fiction.





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*The History of Love* by Leo Gursky (Leo 2) rewritten, still not approved of by Alma  
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Diese in englischer Sprache verfasste Dissertation fußt in den Feldern englische Literaturwissenschaft/Amerikanistik, Cultural Studies und Jewish American Studies. Sie untersucht die Repräsentation von Erinnerung in Werken von Jonathan Safran Foer, Shalom Auslander und Nicole Krauss, Mitgliedern der sogenannten third generation jüdisch-amerikanischer SchriftstellerInnen, welche um den Millenniumswechsel publizieren. Der Fokus liegt auf Werken von Nicole Krauss. Symbolische Charaktere und Objekte, welche in Verbindung zu Erinnerung stehen, werden herausgearbeitet und im Detail analysiert.

This work is rooted in the fields of English Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, and Jewish American Studies. It examines memory representation in exemplary works published around the millennial change by third generation Jewish American writers Jonathan Safran Foer, Shalom Auslander, and Nicole Krauss. The focus lies on the latter's work. Symbolic characters and objects connected to memory are discerned and analyzed in detail.